

# 2020



## OF THE YEAR AWARDS

**O**n a daily basis, letter carriers assist people who need help, and each year NALC highlights the special acts of courage and compassion performed by letter carriers who improve—or save—lives along their routes by choosing some of them as NALC’s Heroes of the Year.

The 2020 Heroes of the Year honorees were selected from more than 100 nominees, whose stories of heroism and community service were published over the course of a year in this magazine, as has been done since 1974.

A panel of independent judges reviewed the stories about heroic and humanitarian acts published in *The Postal Record* between June 2019 and June 2020 and gathered in a virtual meeting to determine the winners. The judges were Christopher Godfrey, chairman and chief judge of the

Employees’ Compensation Appeals Board at the U.S. Department of Labor; Christine Miller, director of labor engagement at United Way Worldwide; and Kim Dine, retired chief of police of the United States Capitol Police.

Because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the traditional in-person fall event could not be held to recognize the 2020 Heroes of the Year. NALC plans to put on a virtual event in the near future to honor the recipients.

“We are immensely proud of what the eight Heroes being recognized did,” NALC President Fredric Rolando said. “They represent our country’s best in public service. They truly are our heroes.”

President Rolando also thanked the judges for their work.

The Heroes’ stories are found in the following pages of this issue of *The Postal Record*. **PR**

# Chyanne Fauntleroy

Garden Grove, CA Branch 1100



2020 WESTERN REGION  
HERO OF THE YEAR

**C**hyanne Fauntleroy was on her route on April 19, 2019, when she saw police and volunteers passing out a bulletin for a 15-year-old girl named Abbey, who had been missing for 21 hours. Abbey has autism and functions at the level of a 12-year-old.

The Garden Grove, CA Branch 1100 member asked for a flyer so that she could keep an eye out for Abbey while delivering mail. Fauntleroy then continued driving her route. While driving, she spotted “a girl matching the description with no shoes on” walking down the street, she said. It was about two blocks away from where the girl had last been seen.

The city carrier assistant immediately pulled over next to the girl and

began talking to her to put her at ease. “I used to work with kids with disabilities,” Fauntleroy said. “As she’s talking to me, I’m calling police.”

To build their connection, Fauntleroy told Abbey that she herself was missing and needed help. Abbey said she would help her and told her not to worry or cry.

The carrier kept police on the phone as she asked Abbey random questions to keep her talking. She said that police told her, “You’re doing great; ask her these questions.”

The carrier noticed that Abbey had a drawing in her hand and asked the girl to make a drawing for her, which she did, as Fauntleroy kept her talking and kept asking the questions police

suggested, such as when she had last eaten. When Fauntleroy thought she was losing the girl’s attention, she threw in questions like, “What’s your favorite color?”

“I just kept switching the story up,” she said.

Fauntleroy kept the girl distracted until undercover police arrived.

Medics determined that Abbey was dehydrated but otherwise was all right, and soon reunited her with her family. More than 80 volunteers with the sheriff’s department had been out looking for the girl.

Then, a few weeks later, in early May, Fauntleroy was on her route when she came across a 3-year-old girl who was by herself.

“Where’s Mama?” she asked the crying girl when she ran up to her. She appeared not to speak English, so the carrier called 911 and waited with her for about 10 minutes. Before police arrived, the child’s mother came, and Fauntleroy was able to reunite them.

In selecting Fauntleroy as the 2020 Western Region Hero of the Year, the judges noted that the girls’ lives “were in pretty serious danger,” adding that it was important that the carrier “knew how to keep [both girls] safe and engaged during that time.”

The second-year letter carrier received praise in local and national media for watching out for her patrons. “I don’t think I’m a hero,” Fauntleroy said. “I was just doing the right thing that anyone else would do.” **PR**



# Gerald Soileau

Lafayette, LA Branch 1760



2020 CENTRAL REGION  
HERO OF THE YEAR



**“I** thought it was thunder, it was so loud,” Gerald Soileau recalled about hearing what sounded like an explosion outside the post office on Saturday, Dec. 28, 2019. He and fellow Lafayette, LA Branch 1760 members were busy casing their routes that morning when the sound echoed through the post office.

He was one of the first carriers to exit the building to see what was going on—and when he opened the door,

he saw a scene from a nightmare. “Everything was on fire,” Soileau said. A mid-sized plane had crashed into their parking lot, hitting several vehicles and setting most of the area ablaze.

Soileau reacted quickly, realizing that the main gate was blocked by the fire, he rushed around to the other gate, which was padlocked shut due to construction. As Soileau described it: “God allowed me to hit the gate, and the chains fell off.” The carrier then was able to sprint through to the parking lot. “The fuselage [of the plane] was scattered everywhere, and the whole area was covered in black smoke,” he said. “I felt like I was running in slow motion.”

After the plane crash-landed and broke into pieces, a large part of it had landed in a field next to the post office. “It left a trail of smoke and fire,” Soileau said. The carrier ran over to that part of the plane and helped rescue the only surviving passenger, who had severe

burns all over his body. The other five passengers on the plane had been killed in the crash.

Once Soileau had pulled the injured man to safety, he ran over to another victim of the crash: a carrier’s spouse, Danielle Britt, who had driven to the office to surprise the carriers with donuts. The plane had collided with her car, ejecting her from the vehicle.

Soileau and a holiday clerk carried Britt away from the area, which was still in flames. She was badly burned and had to undergo numerous surgeries after her hospitalization. Soileau also was taken to the hospital, where he was treated for smoke inhalation and stress.

The 22-year carrier described the experience as surreal. “It seemed like I was having an out-of-body experience,” he explained. “I wasn’t scared that I was going to die—I just knew when I heard them crying for help that I had to help.”

The Heroes of the Year judges were impressed by Soileau’s actions, commenting that they “had never heard anything like it before.” Soileau had “probably saved lives,” they added.

Having spent 10 years in the Air Force, Soileau thinks his military training helped him keep calm in the extraordinary situation. “I was just trying to do what I could,” he said.

As for his recognition as the 2020 Central Region Hero of the Year, the carrier expressed gratitude for the award, but was hesitant about the label. “I really didn’t see myself as a hero,” Soileau said. “I reacted and did what we all should do—help our brothers and sisters.” **PR**

# Sydney Rodgers

## Buffalo-Western New York Branch 3



2020 EASTERN REGION  
HERO OF THE YEAR

**A**s Buffalo-Western New York Branch 3 member **Sydney Rodgers** began to drive away from a house on her route that she had just delivered to on Feb. 12, a car pulled into the house's driveway.

As the carrier watched, a man got out of the car, dragged his female passenger out of the car, and engaged in an altercation with her, Rodgers said.

The carrier called the police, and then ran to the woman's aid. "I told the guy to get off of her, and then he started coming at me," Rodgers said.

The carrier's interference gave the woman time to flee inside, but it didn't stop the attacker for long. Once more, he began to move in intimidating fashion toward Rodgers.

"He was yelling at me and coming at me," she said. She went back to her truck, and once she called 911, the man fled the scene.

Buffalo police received the call from Rodgers at 11:30 a.m. and responded to the scene. The carrier provided police with the license plate number of his car. "We carry pens with us, so I was able to write it down as he was driving away," she said.

She also briefed her postal supervisors on the incident, and postal inspectors discussed the matter at a meeting with the station's letter carriers the next day.

Rodgers, a former four-year letter carrier who left the Postal Service earlier this year, said that she felt she had made a difference with her intervention, adding: "I stepped in and did what anyone should."

The judges agreed with Rodgers' assessment. "She was observant enough and diligent enough to notice what was going on," they said, and as a result was able to make a "big difference."

The carrier said she was grateful to be named the 2020 Eastern Region Hero of the Year. **PR**



# Matthew King

Champaign, IL Branch 671



2020 SPECIAL CARRIER ALERT  
AWARD HERO OF THE YEAR

“I was parked for my 10-minute break, and I looked to my left,” Champaign, IL Branch 671 member **Matthew King** recalled. It was March 12, 2019, and King was on his route.

“I [originally] thought that someone was grilling,” he said, “but then I knew that there was too much fire.”

One of the houses in the neighborhood had caught fire—a stray cigarette butt had set the porch ablaze. “I ran over and banged on the door [to alert anyone inside],” the three-year carrier said. As it turned out, an entire family, including three children, was still inside the home, unaware that the house was in flames.

After helping everyone outside, King called 911 and went into the home to find buckets. He subsequently organized a chain of water buckets with help from neighbors, and then managed to keep the fire contained

until firefighters arrived. Thanks to King’s timely intervention and quick thinking, “we were able to save the house,” he said, and nobody was injured.

The story was covered at the time by the local NBC affiliate, WAND-TV, and King was recognized in an award ceremony at the fire station for his act of bravery. But King, an Army veteran, shrugged off the praise and ceremonies. “I don’t really feel like I had a choice in the matter,” he said. “When there’s something that needs to be done,” such as extinguishing a burning building, “you just have to do it.”

The judges praised King’s impulse to act quickly, saving the lives of a family and saving their home from serious damage, and recognized him with NALC’s 2020 Special Carrier Alert Award. “He was taking care of the neighborhood,” they said. **PR**



The residents of the home Matthew King saved thanked him.

# Eric Beu & Mark Simone

Cleveland, OH Branch 40



2020 UNIT CITATION  
HEROES OF THE YEAR

**A**fter attending Branch Officers Training for the day in Minneapolis, **Eric Beu** and **Mark Simone**, members of Oklahoma City, OK Branch 458, decided to take a train to the Mall of America in the late afternoon of Sept. 17, 2018.

While on the way, a young blind man got off at the same stop as the two carriers. After noticing that the man was about to step onto the open tracks, Beu asked if he needed help. The man, Abraham, told the carrier that he was looking for the Mega Bus stop. Beu googled the location and discovered that the man was at the opposite end of town.

Simone and Beu wanted to help Abraham, so they assisted him in making his way across town. On the way, the two carriers got to know the man, who was in Minneapolis to check out a school for the blind. Abraham's friend had driven him from Chicago and, on the way to Minnesota, they had gotten into an argument; his friend then left him and drove back to Chicago.

"It was just a bad deal for him," Simone said.

Abraham asked if they could help him get back home to Chicago. Simone and Beu agreed that they couldn't leave him stranded in Minneapolis.

Beu bought the man a bus ticket back to Chicago. Because Abraham hadn't eaten since breakfast, and the bus wasn't scheduled to leave for about three hours, they found a restaurant that was still open. After Simone treated Abraham to dinner, the carriers walked him to the bus stop, put him on the correct bus, and made sure he had cab fare to get from the bus station to his home in Chicago.

Abraham called Beu the next morning to let them know that he had made it home and thanked them for the help.

Both carriers dismissed any accolades for their actions.

"We just did what any other normal human being would do," Simone, a 21-year carrier and a Marine Corps

veteran, said.

Beu, in his sixth year of carrying mail, said that, as letter carriers, "We keep our heads on a swivel for all sorts of things."

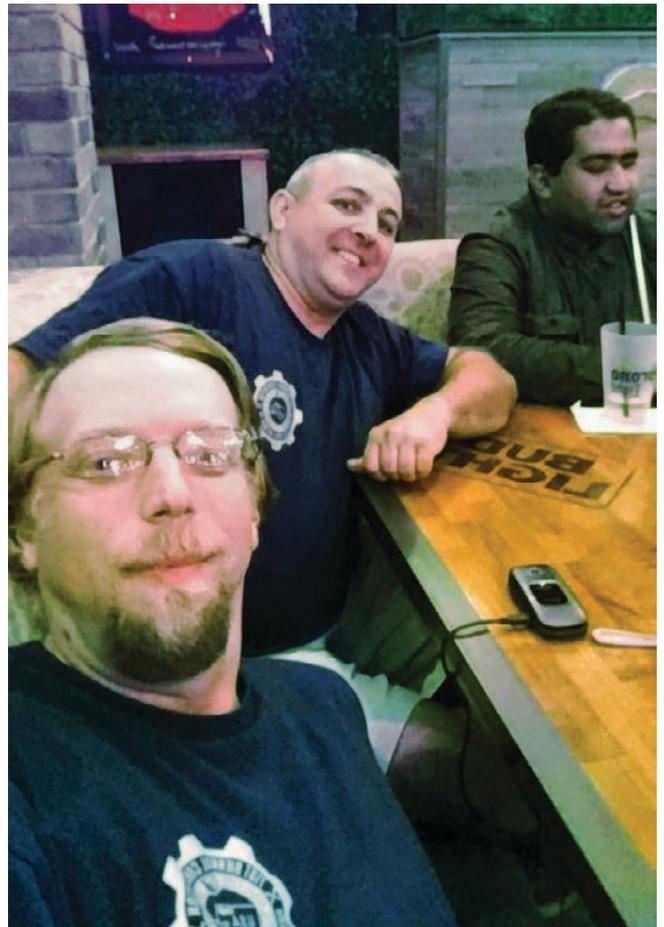
Simone added, "Your customers notice everything you do, whether you see them every day or not."

Although their co-workers have taken to singing "Wing Beneath My Wings" to them at the post office, Beu said that while they were "very humbled and honored," to receive the award, they hadn't acted to gain recognition—they simply "saw someone in need."

Simone echoed that sentiment. "We're not heroes," he said. "You're just at the right place at the right time. It's just chance."

The judges saw heroism and compassion in their actions, though, and were impressed by the pair's ability to stay calm and handle the situation. In bestowing NALC's 2020 Unit Citation Award on Beu and Simone, the judges said, "They went above and beyond the call of duty to help a stranger who needed assistance."

Beu said their actions are all part of the profession. "Our job requires [that] we are observant; this carries over to our life outside the USPS," he said. "When you see someone in trouble, you help without hesitation." **PR**



Eric Beu (l) and Mark Simone helped a blind man named Abraham (r) get food and safely home.

# Jerry Giesting

Cincinnati, OH Branch 43



**Jerry Giesting did more than** mourn after his son, Brad Giesting, died in 2016 after a long struggle with liposarcoma, a rare form of brain cancer. Giesting, an Army veteran like his son and a member of Cincinnati, OH Branch 43, founded a charity group, Brad's Blessings, to give back to the community.

"We didn't want his memory to die," Giesting said.

Brad served in Iraq as part of the 101st Airborne from 2005 to 2006.

While in Iraq, he was exposed to burn pits, used for garbage disposal, in which hazardous waste often was burned. Some veterans and health professionals suspect that the exposure to burn pits has led to health problems, including the type of cancer that took Brad's life.

After returning from Iraq in 2006, Brad married his high school sweetheart

and had two daughters. He was diagnosed with cancer in May of 2013, and despite 70 rounds of chemotherapy, 30 radiation treatments, six surgeries and a last-hope clinical trial, Brad succumbed to the cancer on Oct. 22, 2016.

Despite his enormous health problems, Brad managed to maintain a positive outlook. "He kept the family laughing throughout his ordeal," Giesting said. "He had a huge sense of humor and tried to keep people on a high note, even when he was struggling."

To honor Brad's memory, his family promotes a "Random Acts of Kindness Day" each year on Oct. 22, the anniversary of his death, to urge people to spread love. On that day, Brad's Blessings distributes care packages for people facing health challenges who

are nominated by friends or family. This year, the group received about 75 requests for "sunshine boxes" to spread cheer to ailing people of all ages.

"We started the foundation to help other people who are going through cancer. We tried to find, in particular, families of veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan who were exposed to the burn pits," Giesting said.

Brad's Blessings' activities include scholarships and gifts of supplies for students at both grade school and high school levels. Meanwhile, the Bradley M. Giesting Kindness Scholarship is awarded to a student from a veteran's household with financial need. The first scholarship helped a student pay tuition to attend Archbishop McNicholas High School in Cincinnati, which Brad attended. Also, three graduates of McNicholas who are headed for military careers after graduation received gifts to help them as they moved to a new chapter in life. The foundation awards one high school and one grade school student a scholarship each year.

True to its name, Brad's Blessings has allowed his family to turn a tragedy into service to others with similar challenges.

"It's a terrible thing to have happened," Giesting said, "but we know there are a lot of people out there like him suffering—that's why we want to keep his memory alive and try to help those who have served."

"I'm very surprised, shocked and pleased," at being named NALC's 2020 Humanitarian of the Year, Giesting, a 35-year letter carrier, added.

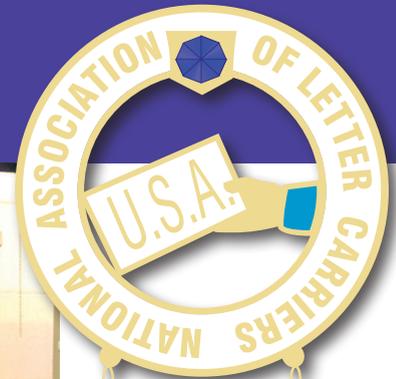
The judges were impressed at the way Brad's Blessings multiplies its impact to encourage others to join in bringing help and good cheer to those in need. The effort "spreads exponentially to help others," they said. "It grows and grows beyond the one deed." **PR**



Brad Giesting (c) with his father, Jerry (r), who went on to create a charity group in Brad's honor.

# Pedro Mendoza

Grand Junction, CO Branch 913



2020 NATIONAL  
HERO OF THE YEAR



**T**he scene of a man yelling at a woman caught the attention of Grand Junction, CO Branch 913 member **Pedro Mendoza** while he was on his route on Jan. 13. “I thought it was a domestic disturbance at first,” he said, and moved quickly to intervene. As he got closer, however, he heard the woman screaming at the man to get away from her and her baby. “I heard him telling her, ‘I’ll kill you,’ and I thought, ‘Oh no, you’re not. Not on my watch,’” the 20-year carrier said.

As Mendoza moved forward, another man also stepped in from across the street. The neighbor, Carlos Garcia, yelled at the suspect to get away from the woman, and “[the man] turned around to go for him,” Mendoza recalled. To keep the man from attacking Garcia, Mendoza asked him what his problem was, and the man turned around to face the carrier. At that point Garcia’s two daughters walked up the street, and Mendoza told Garcia to go protect them: “I said, ‘I can handle this.’”

This comment appeared to infuriate the man further; as he approached the carrier, screaming vicious insults, the man pulled out a knife. “He came toward me, swinging the knife,” the carrier said. “I took off my postal coat and wrapped it around my right arm. Then I waited for the right moment to punch him or take him down.”

Finally, Mendoza saw his chance. “He swung the knife a few times, and then he stumbled,” the carrier said. “And the second the knife was [pointing] down, I rushed him.” He tackled the man to the ground and placed him in a chokehold. “I slammed him to the ground until I heard the knife drop,” he added.

Garcia then came over and grabbed the knife, and they waited for the police to arrive. The man struggled to free himself, but Mendoza kept him pinned, telling him, “I’m not going to let you hurt any of my customers.”

When police arrived, the suspect attempted to escape, but Mendoza helped officers recapture and handcuff him.

“Then I picked up my scanner and went to deliver the mail,” the carrier said.

Mendoza’s actions later were covered by several local news outlets, and the elementary school along his route put up a large sign thanking him for his bravery. The maintenance workers at the post office decorated his postal vehicle with stickers praising him and comparing him to Captain America, the superhero. “I say, I’m not a hero; I just did what I had to do,” Mendoza said.

The judges were deeply impressed with Mendoza’s actions and named him the 2020 National Hero of the Year. “He didn’t know if he’d be killed—the unpredictability of what he was getting into” elevates his heroism, they said. “He put his life in danger.”

Mendoza stated that the most important thing to him was protecting his customers. “People come up to me and say, ‘I don’t know if I would have done what you did for just anyone,’” he added. “But it’s not just anyone. It’s the people on my route.” **PR**