

# INSIGHTS

Metro Transit's weekly employee newsletter

June 12, 2020



Several employees and their families decorated the sidewalks outside the Nicollet Garage with encouraging messages during a "Chalk Walk" on Saturday, June 6. The event was organized by members of Advancing Women in Transit, an employee resource group. Planning for another similar event and other outreach activities is underway. For more information, contact **Carrie Desmond** at [carrie.desmond@metrotransit.org](mailto:carrie.desmond@metrotransit.org). To receive a yard sign with the "In This Together" logo, contact **Drew Kerr** at [drew.kerr@metrotransit.org](mailto:drew.kerr@metrotransit.org).

## Several long-serving employees celebrate their retirements

Several long-serving employees have recently retired. While retirement celebrations have been temporarily been put on hold, those who retire with more than 30 years of service will still be recognized in Metro Transit's Wall of Fame and online. Recent retirees include:



- Janitor **Ramona "Mona" Shafer**, right, who retired on June 5 with 30 years of service. Shafer began her career in the Revenue Department and spent 12 years in Finance before becoming a janitor. For the past five years, she has worked at the Green Line's Operations & Maintenance Facility. At the time of her retirement, Shafer was the third-highest seniority janitor at Metro Transit. In retirement, Shafer planned to spend time traveling, gardening and enjoying the last chapter of life.
- East Metro Mechanic Technician **Gary Cagle**, who retired in May with 39 years of service. A self-described backyard mechanic, Cagle learned how to maintain buses by learning from others on the job. During his career, he spent time at every garage except for old Northside. In retirement, he looked forward to spending more time with family, including several grandchildren, completing projects around the house, and woodworking.
- East Metro Mechanic Technician **Tim Jacobsen**, who retired in April with 35 years of service. Jacobsen spent time at the South, Heywood and old Snelling garages before spending the last 20 years of his career at East Metro. Just 12 hours after punching out for the final time he started learning and practicing a whole new trade as a manual machinist. Outside the shop, Jacobsen plans to spend his time motorcycling and with his two sons.

As we look forward, we must also learn from our past

*From Police Chief Eddie Frizell*

When I joined the Metro Transit Police Department last summer, I spent a lot of time listening to officers, staff, community members and partners. At garages, on the bus and in the community, I wanted to learn all I could about the department and those we serve.



One of the most striking and immediate things I discovered was how diverse the department is. For the first time in my career, I found myself in rooms where all the officers were a person of color or female.

My long-term predecessor, now Commissioner of Public Safety John Harrington, had truly set me up for success, and I knew I was in a position to lead a department defined by its professionalism, diversity and commitment to fairness.

The tragic and unnecessary loss of George Floyd has further amplified an intense debate about whether those same ideals are universally reflected across the law enforcement community.

And with good reason. The actions that led to Floyd's death, including the failure of other officers to intervene, are undeniably troubling and go against everything I have been taught and taught to others during my 30-year career in law enforcement.

Sadly, it is also just the latest example of how people of color are treated differently by police, often with fatal consequences.

As a black police chief, the great great grandson of a Mississippi slave, a product of the Civil Rights movement and a military veteran who has seen hatred fuel killings around the world, the disparities we see in policing are especially personal and upsetting.

I understand systemic racism, and I have experienced it myself. I know what it looks like, what it smells like, and how it erodes a society. The struggle is real, and it is not over.

Because the need for change is evident, I am eager to participate in the larger conversation occurring here and across the country.

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As part of our path forward, Metropolitan Council Chair Charlie Zelle called this week for a comprehensive review of the department's policies, practices and the relationships we have with police agencies throughout the region. I welcome this review and the opportunity to turn its findings into actions that make a difference.

While it may seem like progress cannot come quickly enough, progress is being made.

Since becoming police chief, we have expanded our commitment to protecting at-risk, unsheltered individuals. We have assigned officers to geographic areas so they can better understand the communities they serve. And we have been open to new approaches, like the proposal to shift fare enforcement responsibilities from police to non-sworn personnel.

Our efforts to improve can and must continue. And we must continue to listen – not just because the moment demands it, but because we truly want to serve our community in the best way that we can.

As someone who saw firsthand the immediate aftermath of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination, I can say from experience that the memories of recent weeks will not soon fade. I can also say from experience that they have the power to lead us closer to the outcomes we all hope to see.

Thank you for sharing your voice, for the opportunity to serve you, and for your continued support.

## Rough waters make resiliency more important than ever

Even before George Floyd's death shook the community, the COVID-19 pandemic was putting staff under an unusual amount of stress. Now, as the nation faces unrest, there is an even greater risk of burnout and trauma.

And the list of consequences is long – employees may find it harder to focus, become impatient or simply shut down. Those in positions to make changes may be troubled by limits on what they can do.

Even so, transit is an essential service that must be maintained.

While challenging, Charlotte DiBartolomeo, the founder and CEO of the Red Kite Project, says employees can find strength from within and from those around them. To build resiliency, DiBartolomeo suggests:

Creating small teams that you can share concerns with and provide mutual support to. If you have a mentor or mentee, strengthen that relationship.

CUSTOMERS TELL US HOW WE'RE DOING

### "I received great service"

Transit Information Center Representatives **Kyle Bennett, Ella Brakob** and **Jacqueline Curlott** each spoke with and impressed a regular caller who sought help last week. The TIC received more than 5,700 calls when bus service resumed on Wednesday, June 3, following several days of suspended service. – the highest call volume in the last four years.

*"I know some people only complain, and I've had my fair share of complaints, but I received great service from some of your folks today, and I thought you should know what a great job they are doing. Give them my thanks and a congratulations for being so good at their jobs!"*

Utilizing free counseling services provided through Sand Creek or other mental health resources.

Communicating openly. Managers should ask their teams what they can do to support them and staff should be vocal about what they need to succeed. Empowered employees are resilient employees.

Be gentle in conversations with yourself and others.

"Resilience is about internal and external resources," DiBartolomeo said. "The internal resource is the ability to feel and communicate empathy because that builds relationships and people are healthier with good, strong relationships. The external resource is having a supervisor who is supportive and makes your safety a priority."

The Red Kite Project is a Philadelphia, Pa.-based organization that offers resiliency and de-escalation training at transit agencies across the United States. Metro Transit operators and managers started going through Red Kite training in 2018; in-person classes have been temporarily suspended.

### "I hope we return to peace everywhere"

On Route 21, Nicollet Operator **Omar Iye** drives community members up and down Lake Street. It's familiar turf -- Iye lives in the Whittier neighborhood with his three children. As a Somali immigrant, he also relates to many of the small business owners who have set up shop in south Minneapolis.



So when locally owned businesses were threatened during recent demonstrations, Iye did what he could to deter potential troublemakers. For three nights, he stood in front of businesses and asked people to leave them alone.

"It felt like a war zone," Iye said. "I've experienced this back in Somalia, but never thought something this would happen here in Minnesota."

Iye later helped clean up the neighborhood. Now, he hopes for calm. "I hope we return to peace, not only in my neighborhood, but everywhere," Iye said. "I'll continue to be a good neighbor and help build a good neighborhood for my kids."



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