

# INSIGHTS

Metro Transit's weekly employee newsletter

January 7, 2022

## Two longtime Bus Transportation employees retiree

Congratulations to two longtime Bus Transportation employees who celebrated their retirements this week.

- **Tom Sabourin**, a mark-up dispatcher at Heywood Garage, retired with 43 years of service. Tom began his career as an operator at the old Northside Garage and, except for a short stint at Ruter, spent his entire career there and at Heywood. Sabourin has been a full-time dispatcher since 1996, but he continued picking up extra trips through the end of his career. In retirement, Tom plans to move to Texas to be closer to family.



- **James Underwood**, an operator at East Metro, retired with 37 years of service. After completing seminary school, his wife, transit planner Karen Underwood, suggested applying. Once behind the wheel, he found a wealth of opportunity to help others beyond a church setting. "I feel like a rich man – one in experience, teachers, and friends," Underwood said. "It's the real life onboard a bus, and it's a place I've been a positive influence in the world." In retirement, he plans to do more ministry and music.

Read more about Tom and James and other retirees with 30 or more years of service at [metrotransit.org/greatpeople](https://metrotransit.org/greatpeople).

## Vaccinations, boosters, testing encouraged amid spike in COVID-19 cases

Public health officials expect the number of new cases to continue rising in the coming weeks, and cases among staff are at their highest levels since the start of the pandemic.

To keep everyone safe, public health officials are stressing the importance of vaccinations, boosters, testing and preventative measures like masking and social distancing.

If you are experiencing any symptoms or think you have been exposed, please seek testing. Many sites are busier than usual; plan ahead.

- To make a testing appointment at a HealthPartners clinic, visit [healthpartners.com](https://healthpartners.com) and use the employer code 10397.
- Free testing is available at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport, Minneapolis Convention Center, Roy Wilkins Auditorium and other state-run sites. Review locations, hours and make an appointment at [mn.gov/covid19/get-tested](https://mn.gov/covid19/get-tested).
- To access a Vault mail-in test kit, speak with a manager or supervisor or visit [learn.vaulthealth.com](https://learn.vaulthealth.com).
- At-home test kits are available through many retailers and may be eligible for reimbursement through your Health Reimbursement Account (HRA).

As a reminder, employees who are required to be tested to report for on-site work must resume weekly testing 90 days after testing positive.

## What are you looking forward to in 2022?

Staff across the organization were invited to share what they're looking forward to in the new year. Here are a few of their responses.

- *We have four new hires in the Transit Control Center and a new communication specialist. I look forward to helping them discover their place in the TCC. And, I'm creating a plan to use our group's strengths to team build, reduce stress and promote mental health. For example, a co-worker who knits may offer their time (off the clock) to other TCC staff who would like to learn that hobby. Anyone would benefit from learning a new hobby in 2022!*  
– **Meredith Tvrdik**, TCC Supervisor
- *I am hopeful that we'll continue to regain some normalcy in our work and world, and I look forward to all the positive things this would bring personally and professionally. I am excited for the continued work of the Advancing Women in Transit group and the other Employee Resource Group's to drive positive change in the organization and help us achieve our strategic goals. And I am energized by all the good people who work here – their selfless contributions make me hopeful.* – **Emily Bollensen**, Service Garage Supervisor, Ruter Garage
- *We have so much to be thankful for. We enjoy freedoms in all aspects of our lives, to shop, do commerce, worship, travel and enjoy the blessing of our prosperity. I'm thankful that I have a good job which affords me healthcare and the ability to meet my expenses and obligations in support of my family. I am hopeful that the situations surrounding the virus will dissipate so we can continue these great freedoms we all have and can enjoy.* – **Paul Willis**, Stockkeeper, Nicollet Garage
- *The sense of some normalcy in both the work environment and life in general gives me hope that 2022 will be a better year. It's a great feeling to see the cycling of new hires slowly coming in. Open/cut pieces of runs slowly getting better as each pick goes by. Seeing movie theaters, malls, and gatherings getting more festive shows that we are*  
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all slowly adjusting to the new norm. Rome wasn't built in a day, and slowly getting there is better than not. I'll take it, smile, and continue to support my fellow bus operators. – **Chia Xiong**, TCC Supervisor

- *I am looking forward to my new role as Rail Director with TSMA and representing my fellow rail colleagues. In the RCC, I am looking forward to the newest hires completing their supervisor training so we can return to a more normal working environment. I cannot overlook the role of Chief Operating Officer position being filled with a permanent occupant and all the positive changes that will come along with it.* – **Thorton H.O. Ridder**, Rail Transit Supervisor
- *As our department grows and we hire more sworn officers and Community Service Officers, I am hopeful that we can slowly change how the community sees policing. I am hopeful that with new faces will come new ideas on how to bridge the gap between the minority communities we serve and the police department. And I am hopeful that fresh viewpoints will introduce more opportunities for people of color to be in higher leadership roles, creating an equitable working environment for everyone.* – **Sgt. Kadra Mohamed**
- *I am hopeful that 2022 will bring more opportunities to offer tours of the Green Line Extension. With almost 60% of civil construction complete, our team has tremendous progress to share. We have an incredible team of talented and dedicated people working every day to deliver this project. It's exciting to bring people out on a tour so they can see how much has been built first-hand.* – **Joan Hollick**, Southwest Light Rail Project Office
- *We've gone through a lot of struggles and we've done a lot to make things safer for our drivers and our riders. So, I'm hopeful that in 2022 everyone will feel confident about coming back together and using transit to go out and enjoy themselves. I'm noticing new people coming out all the time, so I think our riders are already seeing the confidence in us and know we're doing our best, that we're in it together.* – **Lanh Thao**, Operator, East Metro

#### CUSTOMERS TELL US HOW WE'RE DOING

### "I felt very safe and welcome"

Ruter Operator **Michael Kluthe** recently impressed a Route 721 customer who appreciated the concern and respect they showed during a recent trip.

*I would like to give a big thanks to this driver. I use a motorized scooter, and before he could put out the ramp he had to clear a bunch of snow that was on the edge of the sidewalk. Once on board, he was very accommodating and patient as I got turned around to park in the space. I felt very safe and welcome, he knew exactly how to put the straps on my scooter and made sure they were tight, and he was so pleasant to me. This young man should get a bonus for being so nice.*

*Marie Offelen*

**Black History Month:** The Black History Month Committee is inviting employees to participate in an online talent contest to help celebrate Black History Month. To participate, employees are invited to submit short videos showing their talents as soon as possible. Videos can be uploaded to YouTube or shared through OneDrive with Traci Williamson and Drew Kerr. For further directions, email [drew.kerr@metrotransit.org](mailto:drew.kerr@metrotransit.org). For more information, contact committee members Traci Williamson, Devona Love or Demetre Muhammad.

**Learn more about new BIPOC Employee Resource Group:** All employees are invited to learn more about a new Employee Resource Group (ERG) that will serve as a resource for those interested in supporting and networking with staff who identify as Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC). Virtual kick-off meetings will be held at 5 p.m. on Tuesday, Jan. 18, and at noon on Wednesday, Jan. 19. For a calendar invitation and more information, email [victoria.dan@metrotransit.org](mailto:victoria.dan@metrotransit.org). The BIPOC ERG is in the process of being recognized by the Council; once that occurs, staff will be able to commit paid time to attending group meetings and other group-related activities.

**Operator hiring:** One-day bus operator hiring events will be held at the Instruction Center on Saturday, Jan. 15, and Wednesday, Jan. 19. Job seekers who attend these events can apply and interview in one visit. As a reminder, employees who refer successful candidates earn a \$600 bonus.

**Employee Engagement & Satisfaction Survey:** Today, January 7, is the final day to complete the Council's Employee Engagement & Satisfaction Survey. Completing this survey will help leadership make deliberate organizational changes that build pride, help managers become more effective leaders and improve development opportunities for all staff. The survey can be completed in a few minutes and all responses are anonymous. Find a paper form in any breakroom or scan this QR code with your camera phone to access the survey online.



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