

INSIGHTS

Metro Transit's weekly employee newsletter

January 7, 2022



Several bus and train operators are celebrating career milestones this month. From left to right: South Operator **Art Shelton**, who retires next week with 42 years of service; Train Operator **Jerry Fredine**, who retired on January 6 with 25 years of service; Heywood Operator **Keyford Hayes**, who retired this month with 25 years of service; and Heywood Operator **Duane Moore**, who was recently recognized for 30 years of safe driving.

In memoriam: Tom Humphrey, director of asset management

Tom Humphrey usually kept a pretty full calendar. But if someone needed his help, he always found the time. "I almost felt sorry for the guy because of how available he was," said Abel Mumbi, assistant director of Bus Maintenance. "I'd call him, he'd be at the Grand Canyon, and he'd still pick up and say, 'What can I do to help?'"



That willingness to help stood out to many who worked alongside Tom during his nearly 42-year career and who are remembering him following his passing on Saturday, Jan. 8. Services will be held next week.

Tom's career began in March 1980, as a cleaner. Over the following decades, he worked his way up into technician, supervisor, manager, and assistant director roles in Bus Maintenance. He moved to asset management in 2017, where he served as director.

Applications Developer Scott Weis worked with Tom while he was in Bus Maintenance, learning to build programs that could help managers keep better track of personnel and maintenance issues. Scott remembered Tom as a self-taught "visionary" who was always thinking about how processes could be improved.

More than his technical prowess, though, Scott recalled Tom as a welcoming person who always had stories and photos to share from his many travels. "What I remember most is the smile and the charisma he would bring to a room," Scott said. "Whenever I had a meeting with Tom, I was always confident and calm because I knew we were going to come to consensus."

Tom and his younger brother John Humphrey, who passed away earlier this month and worked at Metro Transit for nearly 33 years, will each be inducted into Metro Transit's Hall of Fame.

Every challenge brings more admiration, appreciation

From Brian Funk, Acting Chief Operating Officer

The prevalence of COVID-19 cases in our community and in our workplace has always fluctuated.



But the dramatic increase in new cases we've experienced over the past few weeks is unlike anything we've seen since the pandemic began. About 1 in five of all the cases we've seen here at Metro Transit have been reported since December 25.

Each of these cases is concerning because we know full and quick recoveries are not guaranteed. Because of the continued risks, all of us must take this seriously and do our part to protect ourselves and those around us.

In practice, that means getting vaccinated and boosted when we can do so, getting tested and staying home if we don't feel well, wearing a well-fitted mask, and limiting close interactions.

Nearly two years into this pandemic, I know maintaining these habits isn't easy. We'd all like to let our guards down, to live without this uneasiness and uncertainty, and to simply spend more time with one another. Unfortunately, we're not there yet.

The good news is that most public health experts agree this rapid rise in cases will be short-lived. Cases associated with this new variant, on average, have also tended to be less severe, especially for those who have been vaccinated and boosted.

About 80% of our employees have reported being fully vaccinated, and our weekly testing program has helped to proactively identify positive cases.

So, there are reasons to be optimistic. But there is no avoiding the fact that the significant challenges we're facing today will be with us a while longer.

Our biggest challenge, aside from keeping everyone safe, is simply having enough people available to keep buses and trains running as scheduled.

continued on next page

We are about 20 bus operators short of our ideal staffing level, and the recent uptick in cases has left us even more short-handed. Please know how much your continued persistence is admired and appreciated.

I recognize that it is also difficult to bring energy to our work while grieving the loss of co-workers and loved ones, caring for children, and missing the people and activities that bring us joy.

These hardships are not lost on me, and I want to support your wellbeing in any way that I can. t

This pandemic has tested all of us in unforeseen ways, and the trials aren't yet over. But through it all, I continue to be amazed by the determination and the spirit you all bring to your work every day. As always, thank you for your service.

Vaccine buses recognized by Dept. of Human Services

Efforts to retrofit a fleet of buses to serve as mobile vaccination units earned acclaim this week from the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS). DHS officials today will present Metro Transit with a Circle of Excellence Award, which recognizes organizations for expanding access to food, health care, and other assistance. The buses have been used at 170 clinics statewide, serving more than 7,000 people.

Recent service changes extended, more reductions ahead

Due to the ongoing bus operator shortage, service is expected to be reduced in March. Current schedules will remain in place until Friday, March 25, two weeks longer than previously planned. The next pick will also serve as a system pick, allowing operators to move between garages.

Veterans invited to help form Employee Resource Group

Rail Safety Officer **Rick Taylor** separated from the U.S. Air Force a decade ago. But that experience, he says, remains an ever-present part of his identity. And he knows other veterans can relate.

So, Taylor is hoping to start a new Employee Resource Group (ERG) that would give veterans and others with military connections a way to share information and support one another. The group, like all ERGs, would be open to all employees. Once recognized by the Council, group members would be allowed to dedicate paid time to meetings and related activities.

For more information, please email ricky.taylor@metrotransit.org

CUSTOMERS TELL US HOW WE'RE DOING

"Because of this kind bus driver I got to work on time!"

Heywood Operator **Brian Logan** recently made a customer's day by being alert and courteous.

I was not paying attention to the exact time of the scheduled stop at Penn and Plymouth and found myself running the last 25 yards to try to catch it. The driver had already opened the doors, closed them and was just starting to take off. Somehow, he was aware of me sprinting toward the bus and graciously opened the doors. If I would have missed this bus it would have been my fault. Because of this kind bus driver I got to work on time! For as long as I have experienced this driver, he has always been very safe, professional, and courteous.

Bill Dexheimer Pharris

New Equity & Inclusion Team members introduced

The Equity & Inclusion Team is welcoming several new members this month. Team members meet regularly to discuss ways to foster a more inclusive workplace and celebrate diversity.

The new members are:

- **Anthony Moore**, operator, Ruter
- **Ed Zapata**, maintenance admin, Heywood
- **German Gonzalez**, operator, Nicollet
- **Gabe Hafeman**, data request liaison
- **Kathryn Lehinger**, Market Development Specialist
- **Sgt. Kadra Mohammed**
- **Ahmed Dualeh**, police officer
- **Hela Maurer**, police officer

For more information about the Equity & Inclusion team, email sarah.berres@metrotransit.org.

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 invitations and more information, email 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.



The Insights newsletter is published weekly. For more information, visit Insights on MetNet. A link can be found on the homepage. Feedback and story ideas can be sent to insights@metrotransit.org.