

INSIGHTS

Metro Transit's weekly employee newsletter

January 21, 2022



Two longtime operators celebrate their retirements

Two longtime operators celebrated their retirements this week.

- Train operator **Harry Mandik**, above left, retired with 35 years of service. A St. Paul native, Mandik began as a part-time bus operator at the old Snelling Garage. After 17 years as a bus operator and relief instructor, he joined the first group of operators who moved to light rail. He's worked on the Green Line since it opened in 2014.

Mandik went his entire career without a responsible collision, won two Rail Rodeos and placed second in three consecutive Bus Roadeos. In 2021, he was named the Minnesota Public Transit Association's Operator of the Year, a reward reflected both his skills and his role as a leader among his peers.

Mandik is the last remaining train operator from the first group that came to light rail. In retirement, he plans to spend more time volunteering and pursuing other interests like personal finance, home architecture and bicycling. "This job has provided a good wage and steady employment for 35 years," he said. "I've done pretty well so now it's time to give back."

- East Metro Operator **Kelly McKee**, above right, retired with 34 years of service. McKee grew up in Iowa and moved to Minnesota looking for work. After a few years at a big box store, he began working as a school bus operator, then came to Metro Transit as a part-time operator at what was then known as the Shingle Creek Garage.

Through the decades, McKee has worked at every garage except South. In retirement, he plans to take a road trip across the United States with his wife.

Public health officials recommend N95, KN95 masks: In response to the latest surge in COVID-19 cases, public health officials say more protective N95 or KN95 masks should be worn in higher-risk indoor settings. N95s and KN95s are now available for employees from managers and supervisors upon request; look for additional styles to be available soon. To be most effective, masks need to be fitted properly. Cup your hands around the outside edges of the mask and check to see if air is flowing from the area near your eyes or the sides of the mask. Any mask is better than no mask. But cloth masks, scarves and neck gaiters provide the lowest levels of protection.

A few short notes during an eventful week

From General Manager Wes Kooistra

With the rapid spread of the Omicron variant, ongoing workforce challenges, and the snowy and cold weather, I want to reiterate how much I appreciate everything you're doing to manage and work through the challenges we're facing. I sincerely thank you.



With so much going on, I wanted to provide a few brief updates to catch you up on some recent events.

Brian Funk appointed Deputy General Manager – Chief Operating Officer

This week, I was proud to introduce **Brian Funk** as our next Deputy General Manager-Chief Operating Officer. I want to say again how excited I am that Brian is taking on this new leadership role. He is a proven, tireless leader who cares deeply about our employees and the success of transit in our region. Congratulations, Brian!

Mental health

As a society, we've done a lot to destigmatize mental illness and mental health needs. It's also been encouraging to see us expand on the resources we offer through Fit For Life and initiatives like the Red Kite Project, which help build resiliency among operators.

Some of us have personal struggles with mental health. Chances are many of us experience mental illness among our family members and friends. We also may experience short-term mental health and wellness challenges due to the loss of loved ones, increased work demands, and disruptions and limitations to valued daily routines.

So, I again encourage you to use the resources that are available, including the upcoming January 26 session on grief and loss (details below).

Engagement survey

More than 1,300 of you completed our recent Employee Engagement & Satisfaction Survey – thank you!

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Responses will be reviewed and summarized over the coming weeks, and we look forward to sharing what we heard.

This survey is an important source of input for our Great Workplace Project, and we will be providing more opportunities to share feedback and improve our work culture through this effort in the coming weeks.

State Legislature

The 2022 State Legislature will begin meeting at the end of this month to work out the details of infrastructure investments and public safety measures, among other issues. It remains far too soon to even guess what will happen before the session ends in March, but we have a good start! Gov. Walz has proposed a \$2.7 billion infrastructure package that includes \$60 million for Arterial Bus Rapid Transit (ABRT) projects.

On the policy side, we plan to again advocate for an administrative citation bill that would provide an alternative to the current penalty for fare evasion.

Coupled with the expansion of our Community Service Officer program, now underway, this law change would help provide a more equitable approach to fare enforcement and improve safety by increasing our official presence on transit.

As the session proceeds, we will be asked to provide a lot of information under very short time frames. Thank you in advance to all of you who support the legislative process by providing timely responses to these requests.

Sand Creek Presents: Grief and Loss

All employees are invited to attend an online session about responding to feelings of grief and loss with self-care and coping strategies. The session will be led by Sand Creek counselor Chrissy Eberly and will run from 12:30 p.m. to 2 p.m. on Wednesday, Jan. 26. For information, email fitforlife@metc.state.mn.us.

On the Clock/Off the Clock: Train Operator
Jeremiah Collins

Lives: Bloomington
Years of service: Nearly 10

How did you come to work at Metro Transit and what do you do?

I used to be a tool distributor and went to the garages where I would talk to the mechanics, who told me how nice it was to work here. When I closed my tool business, I became a part-time operator and



drove on weekends. After six months, I liked it so much I went full-time. When the Green Line opened in 2014, I became a train operator.

What do you like the most about being “On the Clock”?

Interacting with the public. Everybody is different, but you treat everybody the same. Growing up on Lake Street, I’ve been around people from all walks of life all my life.

What are your favorite activities when you’re “Off the Clock”?

I ran my first marathon about the time I closed my tool business. I was about 50 pounds overweight, and my doctor told me we’d better do something about it, so I started running. After adopting a healthier lifestyle, I lost the weight, my sleep apnea went away, and my blood pressure and cholesterol numbers were perfect.

I ran the Twin Cities Marathon for the first time in 2007 and have run it every year since. I am looking forward to running it for the 15th time this fall. My best finish was four hours 30 minutes in the 2012 race. And, I just completed my 23rd marathon in Hawaii where I happened to meet new Deputy Regional Administrator Georges Gonzalez at the starting line. It was a small group, and I heard someone saying they were moving to St. Paul. I asked him if he would be taking the Green Line and said that’s where I work. We got a good picture at the starting line!

Complete health assessment, earn \$40

Employees who complete HealthPartners annual health assessment will receive a \$40 gift card.

The online assessment poses questions about nutrition, exercise, emotional health, life satisfaction, and sleep. After completing the survey, you will get specific recommendations to improve your health and wellbeing.

Responses to the assessment are only shared with the Council as combined data for the organization.

To complete the assessment, visit HealthPartners.com/wellbeing and log in with your HealthPartners account.

Congratulations to these employees on their recent anniversaries

25 years

Demetre Muhammad, Operator-Heywood
Richard Timmins, TIC Representative

20 years

Tanya Young, Train Operator
David Peterson, Operator-South
Robert Doerfler, Police Officer (Part Time)
William Koch, Police Officer (Part Time)
William Schlumbohm, Police Officer (Part Time)
Scott Bergevin, Lead Schedule Display Coordinator
Jeff Freeman, Senior Project Coordinator, Engineering & Facilities



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