

# INSIGHTS

Metro Transit's weekly employee newsletter

March 4, 2022



## Congratulations to these employees who celebrated their retirements this week

Several long-serving employees celebrated their retirements this week. They include, from left to right:

- **Randy Finch**, Garage Coordinator, Ruter Garage, 43 years. Randy has served as a bus operator, garage instructor and garage coordinator. He spent most of his career at South Garage, before moving to Ruter Garage almost seven years ago.
- **Dan Syverson**, Rail Coordinator, 41 years. Dan spent 10 years as a bus operator, became an instructor and moved to rail in 2003 to support the opening of the Hiawatha Light Rail Line. He has spent the past five years as a rail coordinator. In retirement, he looks forward to biking, camping, and traveling, including cruising on European rivers and a visit to California to see a daughter who is expecting their first grandchild.
- **Greg Stowe**, Mechanic Technician, Heywood Garage, 38 years. Greg began as a skilled helper and later moved into a technician role. He has spent most of his career at the Heywood Garage. For the past 14 years, he has served on the ATU's executive board. In retirement, Greg and his wife plan to spend time at their cabin up north and take care of his aging mother.
- **David Rogers**, Dispatcher, Nicollet Garage, 31 years. David spent 12 years as a bus operator, working at nearly every garage, before becoming a train operator in 2003. He finished his career as a dispatcher at Nicollet Garage. In retirement, he plans to be a snowbird with his wife, splitting time between Florida and Minnesota.

## Celebrate Women's Month with AWT

Advancing Women in Transit (AWT) is hosting several events in March in celebration of Women's Month. Each event will run from noon to 1 p.m. For more information, email [ruby.daniels@metrotransit.org](mailto:ruby.daniels@metrotransit.org).

- On Tuesday, March 8, International Women's Day, AWT will host a conversation about breaking the bias.
- On Tuesday, March 22, AWT will host a discussion about the history of women in transit.
- On Wednesday, March 30, AWT and Equity & Inclusion staff will partner with staff from LA Metro to host a panel discussion on gender policy in transit.

## Pandemic turning point brings optimism, pride

*From General Manager Wes Kooistra*

Two years ago this week, we communicated with staff for the first time about the need to be aware of a new infectious disease, COVID-19, that had yet to be detected in Minnesota.



A year ago this week, employees were offered the first vaccines we could get our hands on.

And today, we appear to be on the cusp of another new and more hopeful chapter in the life of this pandemic.

The number of new cases has fallen sharply since a January surge. More than 80% of the state's adults have been fully vaccinated, a key to avoiding serious illness. And regional health care providers are finally experiencing some much-needed relief.

These trends, which are also reflected in what we're seeing here at Metro Transit, have led cities and schools to begin relaxing mask requirements, and employers to begin inviting more people back to the office.

This week, we followed suit by pulling back on the requirement to wear masks at our worksites. Soon, we expect to see even more people filling our own offices, to resume in-person public meetings and to gather with one another to celebrate retirements and other achievements.

These are exciting milestones we can all look forward to.

But the transition out of this pandemic, regardless of how well things go, will still take time.

All of us continue to have a responsibility to stay home if we're ill, to seek testing if we're experiencing symptoms, and to respond to changes in workplace policies and public health guidance.

All of us must also respect the fact that we're each moving at a different pace, with unique circumstances and beliefs that shape our behaviors.

Thank you in advance for being patient with each other, and just as importantly with yourself, as we move into this next phase.

*continued on next page*

As we look forward, I want to briefly acknowledge, again, all the tremendous efforts that have brought us to this point.

In short order, we were called to not just get people where they needed to go, but to do so in a manner that protected the health of our staff, our customers, and our wider community.

You answered that call admirably, under at times unimaginable conditions, and for that I will be forever grateful and forever proud.

So, as I have done many times in the past two years, I repeat my thanks and my admiration for all you've done and all you will do to help our region emerge from this pandemic.

And I invite you to join me in looking forward to another year of progress and growth that brings us closer to each other and to the vision we share.

---

Dispatchers recognized for persistence in the face of pandemic challenges

**Terry Dolney** has spent the past 25 years as a dispatcher. But nothing, he said, could have prepared him for what he and his peers have experienced since the pandemic began two years ago.

At points, up to 100 of the operators Dolney works with at East Metro were out sick due to COVID-19 or other illnesses, leaving him and other dispatchers to fill big gaps with just a handful of available operators.

The situation was especially difficult at the start of the pandemic and in January, when COVID-19 cases spiked.

"It's been a very challenging time for this workgroup," Dolney said this week. "You come in in the morning, and you've got 18 pieces of open work to fill and just five drivers. It's hard to figure out what you can cover, what you can't cover."

This week, Dolney was among 46 dispatchers who were recognized for their perseverance. Transit Control Center Assistant Manager **Jim Chisolm**, who works closely with dispatchers to fill open work was also recognized as part of the Awarding Accomplishment program.

"This team works together to assemble a complicated puzzle day after day," Chief Operating Officer **Brian Funk** said. "Their determination and hard work have been critical throughout the pandemic, and especially in these past few months."

In addition to the day-to-day work of covering open assignments, dispatchers also supported an unscheduled pick and helped operators choose fallback options if service needed to be further reduced.

**Robin Gerdesmeier**, a mark-up dispatcher at South Garage, said operators also deserved credit for remaining flexible amid all the increased demands and uncertainty.

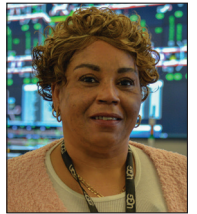
"We've had up days and down days, but every day I come in I try to be friendly and upbeat with all the operators because there's so much other stuff they have to deal with," she said. "Dispatchers are often the first ones they see when they get in and the last ones they see before they go home so staying positive makes a real difference."

And things are getting better: Around 80 trips were cut during the week of February 27, just a fraction of the number that were cut during the worst week in January. Service changes that will take effect on March 26 are aimed at improving reliability by slightly reducing the number of trips being provided as operator hiring efforts continue.

---

Women's Month: Catrina Boucher, Assistant Manager, Rail Transportation

March is Women's History Month, a time to reflect on the contributions women have made and the work yet to be done to achieve gender equity. To help commemorate, women who have broken ground at Metro Transit will be featured in Insights each week.



**What is your role at Metro Transit and what do you like most about what you do?**

I've been an assistant transportation manager at light rail since 2017. Before that, I served as a bus operator, train operator, rail supervisor and senior supervisor. I'm a people person, so what I like most about what I do now is that I get to spend a lot of time talking to other people and trying to help operators as much as I can.

**What advice would you give other women who are interested in a career in transit?**

I would say that you shouldn't be intimidated, even if most of your co-workers might be male. I have always been one of, if not the only, minority women in the room but my voice has always been heard and valued.

**What more can be done to support women in the workplace?**

Only about 10% of our bus operators are women. I'm the only African American woman who has ever served as an assistant manager at rail. So, I think we have to continue trying to attract more women, and a more diverse workgroup in general.

Part of that is education, and part of it is being willing to take the extra step. When I applied for the train operator position, I was working as a bus operator and didn't think I'd be able to make the interview while on my split. But Marcia Padden (Labor Relations Program Manager) offered to pick me up so I could make it on time. I've never forgotten that.



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](mailto:insights@metrotransit.org).