

# INSIGHTS

Metro Transit's weekly employee newsletter

May 5, 2023



## Marjory Burns retires with 31 years of service

In Northern Minnesota, **Marjory Burns** grew up as the youngest of 12 kids and went to school in a one-room schoolhouse. It's there she learned the lessons that would propel her through life.

"We used to live off the land and most days I didn't have lunch at school," Burns said. "It made me what I am – a workaholic. I made sure my kids never went without."

And work, she did. Burns put in more hours at more jobs than one might think was possible – and throughout had six children of her own.

"At one time I was putting in 120 hours a week," she said.

She heard about Metro Transit while driving school buses. She eventually applied to be a bus operator but also for a job at the post office. And for about 7 years, she kept up her workaholic lifestyle as a part-time operator and a rural carrier. Eventually, she left the post office to go full-time here.

"I chose Metro Transit because it had better benefits and retirement," Burns said. "My retirement will cover everything that I'll need."

It wasn't just the benefits that attracted her, however. Throughout the years, she spent most of her career at Heywood Garage and operated every single route they offered.

"I love driving a bus," she said. "My worst nightmare was sitting behind a desk."

Onboard, she loved making people laugh, especially when it helped deescalate a situation, or at the garage with her coworkers. Eventually, she did find herself behind a desk as a dispatcher. However, she discovered that she could still do what's important to her.

"I try to help people – that's my job," Burns said. "If I'm not helping people, I'm not happy."

After all these years, however, she's ready to retire and spend lots of time with her six children and six grandchildren. She also plans to cruise the world, starting this year with six back-to-back ocean cruises.

Commitment to a safe, welcoming system is as strong as ever

From Interim General Manager Lesley Kandaras and Chief Ernest Morales III

When our Safety & Security Action Plan was introduced last year, we knew change wouldn't come easily. But

we also knew we had an obligation to try to make things better for our riders and our staff, and to provide more consistent updates on our progress.

As our latest quarterly update shows, a lot of effort is being made. Every one of the 40 action items identified in the plan has been implemented or is in progress. Notable recent highlights include:

- Executing a contract that will bring supplemental security to up to six locations beginning this spring.
- Increasing staffing in our Real Time Information Center so we can monitor live camera feeds seven days a week.
- Expanding our police presence on trains and at locations with ongoing concerns, like the Lake Street/Midtown Station.
- Contracting with organizations like A Mother's Love and Radies Health whose staff can help connect people to services.

We are encouraged by the progress we've made and are hopeful further improvements will be coming soon. We also know we are still a long way from where we need to be.

We face ongoing challenges related to drug use and property damage. And our police force remains stretched thin – we've only been able to increase patrols because our officers are working longer hours.

The question now, of course, is where do we go from here?

Because the issues that surface on transit are often beyond the scope of what we can handle alone, we are looking at expanded partnerships with service providers.



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To continue rebuilding our ranks, we've increased wages for officers and Community Service Officers and are taking advantage of every recruitment opportunity. (Four new police officers will be sworn in in May and we are hiring Community Service Officers on an ongoing basis.)

A revised Code of Conduct and a new anti-harassment campaign will be brought forward later this year.

Expanding service, ongoing facility investments and providing frontline staff and officers additional training are also important next steps.

We remain committed to hearing from our riders, staff, and partners whose input has always been essential to this work.

Please know that we hear and take seriously all the feedback we receive and are as committed as ever to creating a system everyone can feel safe and welcome using.

Thank you for your continued support.

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Know your operator: Maria Flores,  
Nicollet Garage

As a single mother of two, **Maria Flores** needed a stable career with good pay and benefits – also one less stressful than working in a homeless shelter.



"I like helping people," Flores said. "But working with the homeless is tough."

So, 24 years ago, she applied to Metro Transit and hasn't looked back since. Beyond the benefits, the job provides her with the opportunity to help people and be helped every day.

"Some days we all just need something to make our day," she said. "And I've always been a giving person."

It's the little things that make Flores' day, like a girl who waves to her every single day as she passes along her route or customer who tell her she's doing a good job. She pays it forward with customers in need on board with little gift bags during holidays or gloves and hats during the winter months.

"I try to get to know them and have them get to know me," Flores said. "Then we can appreciate each other."

Beyond customers, she appreciates two coworkers, now longtime friends. As they were all young operators with families, they bonded and supported each other.

CUSTOMERS TELL US HOW WE'RE DOING

## Always so positive and in a great mood

Nicollet Garage Bus Operator, **Abdikarim Jama**, recently received a commendation for his customer service.

*Abdikarim is so kind. He is always making nice conversation and willing to explain the very confusing new routes due to construction. He is always so positive and in a great mood, and I appreciate whenever he is my driver.*

Maddy B

"We'd work our schedules around so we could babysit each other's kids," she said. "And now that they're grown up, we go on vacations together."

Today, Flores wants others who were in her position to consider a career at Metro Transit when they see her face on bus operator hiring advertisements.

"If you want to drive the bus, apply!" Flores said.

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## Briefly

**May is Mental Health Awareness Month:** Join Equity and Inclusion staff at one of two Mental Health Awareness Fairs. Learn how to identify signs of mental health disorders, strategies for difficult interactions, and receive information on resources and services provided by local community organizations. Fairs will take place Wednesday May 17 at North Loop Garage and Tuesday May 23 at South Garage. Contact **Rachel Cagle** at [rachel.cagle@metrotransit.org](mailto:rachel.cagle@metrotransit.org) for more info.

**Save the dates:** Coffee with Cops: Hear from Metro Transit police officers at Coffee with Cops on May 10 at Heywood Garage and May 24 at North Loop Garage. Meet MTPD staff and discuss progress on the Safety and Security Action Plan.

**Take the Network Now survey:** What should our system look like over the next five years? Take the online survey by May 15 to add your thoughts. You will be asked questions about your transit values, and this info will help shape future decision-making framework. Take the survey by scanning the QR code at right.



**Summer Student Pass on sale May 8:** Students at participating high schools can get a summer's worth of rides on buses and light rail for just \$30 with the Summer Student Pass. From June 1 through Sept. 5, students with this pass will have access to unlimited rides on transit. Passes go on sale next week. Visit [metrotransit.org/summer-student-pass](http://metrotransit.org/summer-student-pass) for more details, including a list of participating schools.



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