

On Tuesday, January 4, 2011 after a long, enduring and courageous fight with cancer Byron Lee, 63, passed away. Byron was diagnosed with prostate cancer in 2000 and valiantly fought and kept the cancer at bay for more than 10 years. Despite constantly living with the constant shadow of cancer hanging over him for all these years, Byron continued to come to work and perform his duties with professionalism, respect, friendship and a great degree of humor. Byron left behind many friends and co-workers both within and outside the agency who will truly miss him. Byron is survived by his wife, two sons, a daughter-in-law and his mother.

In June 1979, Byron joined the Southern California Rapid Transit District (RTD) as a Planner and hence started his more than 30 year career (approximately half of his life) with RTD/MTA. Prior to joining RTD, Byron worked a variety of jobs including a stint at teaching tennis – let's just say that those of us who have seen him play or heard him recite his tennis prowess feel that he made a wise decision to join the RTD. He possessed an undergraduate degree from UCLA and a graduate degree from Cal Poly Pomona. During his career with RTD/MTA he held a number of positions, rising to a Supervising Planner in RTD, becoming a Special Assistant to the Executive Officer (Art Leahy – yes the same Art Leahy who is the CEO of MTA and a devoted USC supporter), and towards the end of his career taking on the task of leading the Congestion Relief Operations/Motorist Services department as its Director.

Byron's contribution, impact and legacy can be seen in many places. As the Director of Motorist Services, Byron directed the implementation of the successful Big Rig Service Patrol program, the ADA improvements to the call box system, the expansion of the Metro Freeway Service Patrol program, and a variety of other improvements all designed to serve the motorists of Los Angeles County, fight traffic congestion and improve the overall livability of Los Angeles County. In addition, Byron was a great supporter of all the rail line openings, volunteering his time to fully support each opening. He actively immersed himself in any role he was given and always looked for ways to improve. Many who have seen Byron over the last months have questioned why he continued to come to work, but Byron felt that he still had the ability to contribute to the agency and he also took comfort in the many friendships that he developed over the years at MTA. Over the last couple of months Byron continued to support the efforts of establishing the Transit Court and of improving bus service. To the end Byron was a consummate professional who strived to leave the agency and the world a little better.

The following is a summary of some of the thoughts from various individuals upon his passing:

From Art Henry – Retired MTA Co-Worker

My sincere condolences on the passing of our good friend Byron. I just saw and spoke with Byron while at Metro a few weeks ago and I am saddened by his passing.

From Darrel Cohoon – Consultant

Byron was a good man, a fighter in more than one respect, and will be missed.

From Jerry Rivera – Retired RCTC Employee (FSP and Call Box for Riverside County)

I don't know what to say! I'm so saddened to hear of Byron's passing. Although we sometimes butted heads, I considered Byron a true friend and his family will be in my prayers. We'll all miss that guy in the Hawaiian shirts, shorts and flip-flops!

From Frank Quon - Caltrans

I have had an opportunity to work with Byron since the mid-90's and enjoyed working with him. He will be missed!

From Sgt. Bill McKenna - CHP

I am sorry to hear of this loss. Byron was a great man. I will keep him and his family in my prayers.

From Baron Grey - Consultant

I'm going to miss my friend and golf buddy.

From Rich Long – MTA Co-Worker

I am happy B is no longer suffering and very sad at the same time that he is gone. He was a true friend and someone I could confide in.

From Aida Asuncion – Former MTA Co-Worker

I am deeply saddened by this news, we lost a truly good friend and colleague, never to be forgotten and always to be remembered as one of the most honest and caring person I've ever known. May he rest in peace.

From Mike Brewer – MTA Co-Worker

I am saddened by Byron's passing but happy that I was able to visit with him regularly during the past year. We talked about many of the professional and personal experiences that we shared over the past 30 years, which led us both to conclude that life is too short. He was my first supervisor when I promoted to the planning department in 1981 and we became good friends. Byron had many good friends at Metro and the former RTD and we all will miss him very much.

One way to value the measure of a person is based upon the impact he or she has had on others and the friends he has left behind. Based on this small sampling, Byron was indeed a person of great worth and impact. He will be missed but never forgotten.