

INSIDE STORY - Tina Arellano, left, and Barbara Lorenzo transform a Pasadena Hilton hotel room into temporary headquarters for MTA bargaining team. PHOTOS BY BILL HEARD

Tina Arellano, Barbara Lorenzo are Admin Backbone of MTA's Negotiating Team

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Sept. 25) For 117 days - with only an occasional weekend break - Tina Arellano has spent a major part of her waking hours in a cluttered room at the Pasadena Hilton. As secretary for the MTA's labor negotiating team, she has played a key role in keeping the administrative side of things humming.

Across the desk from Arellano sits her supervisor, Barbara Lorenzo, a veteran of 111 days as the bargaining team's recorder. In this role, she takes notes during negotiations, prepares spread sheets of the proposals being exchanged, performs research and tracks the status of negotiations.

After commuting 45 minutes on the 210 Freeway from her home in Azusa, Lorenzo often spends 12 to 15 hours a day - sometimes seven days a week - in the negotiators' temporary headquarters. "I've never done this before and I don't know what you could possibly do to prepare for something like this. It does take a toll on you."

Arellano, who lives in Covina, is normally a document control assistant in the Office of Labor Relations. She also is getting her first experience at providing full-time support to a bargaining team.

Slow days, busy days



LABOR CAMP-Arellano and Lorenzo make do in cramped suite.

"It has its days," she says of a job that veers between hours of tedium and moments of tension. "Some days are slow, some are super-busy. If I were here by myself, that would be hard."

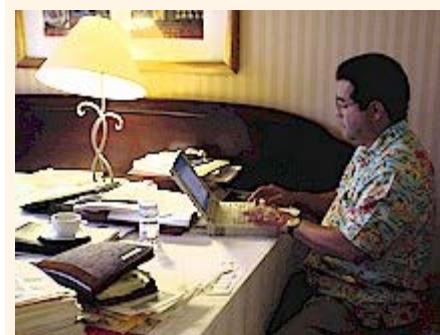
Lorenzo agrees. "The toughest part is having patience. This is not fun. It's a whole lot of hard work."

"Organization is important here and both Barbara and Tina do a good job with that," says Rudy Lipscomb,

assistant director of Employee Relations and a veteran of three MTA labor negotiations.

"Tina keeps us organized, keeps track of the negotiating rooms and tells everyone where to go," he explains. "Barbara's work is essential because she keeps a chronology of the negotiations. Knowing we have this kind of support keeps our minds at ease."

Supporting the negotiators, however, is work that takes place under less than optimal circumstances. The cramped suite where the group has set up camp is an assembly area for bargaining teams that form up, disappear for an hour or more into other rooms, then straggle back to regroup. The place long ago ceased to look like a hotel room.



MTA Operations DEO Dan Ibarra

Where beds should be, desks have been set up. Computer tables, fax machines and a copier crowd the floor.

Papers - some stacked neatly, some not - are everywhere. Coffee-stained cups and saucers are piled on a hotel cart. A scrap of paper taped to one bathroom door restricts its use to women only.

A sandwich in the room

Bags and bowls of Oreos, M&Ms, Jolly Rancher candies and potato chips provide quick-energy - if fattening - snacks for nervous negotiators. Regular mealtimes are a thing of the past. Team members eat when and where they can. Sometimes in the hotel coffee shop, but more often than not, it's a sandwich in the room.

"I think I've gone through the restaurant's whole menu and eaten everything on it," says Arellano. "Every once in a while we get a change of pace, but usually it's room service for me because I need to be here to answer the phones."

What does Arellano want her fellow employees to know about what's going on in Pasadena?

"The team has really been working hard," she says. "We're on top of each other because the room is small, but everyone has given all their effort to this. Sometimes you think, 'I'm going crazy!' but I would do it again."

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