

EDITOR'S NOTE: Mike Parker is a lieutenant in the Sheriff's Transit Services Bureau. He is stationed at the MTA's Rail Operations Center. "On The Job" is an occasional Bulletin Board feature about the little things that make a law enforcement officer's job interesting and rewarding.

On The Job

Help for Stranded Chinese Ends With a Song

By MIKE PARKER

(Jan. 30, 2002) Imagine yourself stranded in the middle of China. No money in your pocket, no friends and no way to communicate.

Well, for Weixen Wang, a Chinese man who only speaks Mandarin, something like that really happened—in the middle of Los Angeles.

Around 3 p.m., last Sunday, MTA Rail Operations Supervisor Amador Silva found Wang lost, hungry and scared at the Artesia station on the Metro Blue Line.

With some inventive sign language and a lot of patience, the professional and kind-hearted Silva calmed the man and bought him a meal. Silva also tried to help Wang call a New York phone number he had with him. Then, his options exhausted, Silva took the man to the Sheriff's Station at the Rail Operations Center.

With the help of an AT&T language line interpreter, deputies Jose Belmarez and Gary Lindenmayer learned that a traveling companion had deserted Wang in Los Angeles some days ago, penniless and without identification. He had many relatives, but they were all in New York.

Contacted his family

The deputies helped Wang contact his family by phone, then bought him lunch. After the meal, they decided to take him to St. Dorothy's Church in Glendora, where a homeless outreach group includes a Mandarin speaker.

On the way to St. Dorothy's, the deputies realized they needed Wang's age for their report. Belmarez wrote down his own age and that of his partner. He showed the numbers to the man and pointed to himself and to Lindenmayer. No luck.

After several unsuccessful attempts, Belmarez jokingly began to sing, "Happy Birthday to You." Much to his surprise, Wang smiled and began to sing along – in Mandarin. Then, he wrote down his age – 32 – for the deputies.

Some things do translate well, after all.

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