

✓ Metro Bus Operator Keith Huling, a community activist in the Northeast San Fernando Valley, is playing a key role in obtaining transit services for the Children's Museum of Los Angeles.



Community Involvement an Integral Part of Life for Division 15 Operator Keith Huling

By AMY HOWELL

(April 10, 2002) East Valley Division 15 Operator Keith Huling is brimming with quirky tidbits about the Northeast San Fernando Valley community in which he lives.

Queen Elizabeth has placed orders with a local chrysanthemum farm. Scenes from the 1998 movie, *The Players Club*, were filmed near his home. Huling himself is good friends with resident Bill Marshall, who played the title role in the 1972 vampire parody, *Blacula*.

But his connection goes well beyond an awareness of pop culture trivia. "I've been involved with the community many, many years," said Huling, who has lived in Pacoima since 1962.

Huling received a Certificate of Appreciation from former Los Angeles City Council Member Richard Alarcon's office in March 1997 for his participation in a drug activity reduction program. Aimed at getting dealers and users off the streets and into rehab or jail, Huling said the program was introduced "so we could make our community safe."

He is involved with the local chapter of the NAACP, and participated in last December's Snow Day, a community fair co-organized by the City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks and Communities and Schools.

Huling also was part of the Hansen Dam Feasibility Committee, formed to earmark funds for the maintenance of the dam, located in Lake View Terrace, just a few minutes from his home.

His latest community venture

Huling's latest community venture is the North Valley campus of the Children's Museum of Los Angeles, which will be located within the Hansen Dam Recreational Area. The museum is the first to be built in the San Fernando Valley.

The museum will be adjacent to the Lake View Terrace Branch of

the Los Angeles Public Library, currently under construction and scheduled to open later this year. The site also will feature a first-of-its-kind baseball academy, swimming and fishing lakes, a picnic area and a playground.

Combining his passion for community advocacy with the experience he has gained from 13 years as a Metro Bus operator, Huling is a representative of the Children's Museum's Commission for Greater Los Angeles.

Museum CEO Sally Thompson says the commission is composed of individuals who have demonstrated community or corporate leadership. "He's very excited about the project," she said.

"Keith understands the fact that having the site out there, transportation is an issue because there really aren't enough bus lines," said Thompson. "He's really diligent about the fact that there needs to be adequate transportation for people who might not be able to drive out that far or don't have access to a car."

Thompson said there is concern not only for the transportation needs of people visiting the site from Downtown Los Angeles and areas farther away, but also from other parts of the San Fernando Valley.

Seeing that things are done right

Both Thompson and Huling hope existing Metro Bus lines that serve the area will offer extended services once the museum opens. They also are aiming to implement a shuttle that would travel between the North Hollywood Metro Red Line station and the recreational area.

"He has been doing research and talking with some folks," said Thompson. "He's looking at that whole community and saying, 'How do we increase the transportation so that more folks can access that whole site?'"

Huling was recommended to serve on the commission by fellow representative Marie Harris, who has lived in Pacoima for some 35 years and has known Huling since he was a little boy.

"He's just a wonderful person, and very devoted to children. I've always tried to involve him," said Harris, who was appointed Honorary Mayor of Pacoima in 1987.

Huling is "fascinated, amazed and proud" to be a part of the process that will eventually yield the first museum in the San Fernando Valley.

Does he consider himself a community advocate? Not necessarily. "I just like to see things done, and that they're done right."

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