

Operator Turns in Cache of Diamonds, Rare Coins Left on Bus

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(April 17, 2002) When a patron handed Metro Bus Operator Federico Ruelas-Cervantes a zippered pouch and told him someone had left it on his bus in downtown LA, last Sunday morning, he put it aside until he got back to East Valley Division 15.

Imagine Ruelas-Cervantes' surprise when he and Dispatcher Quincy Floyd opened the pouch to inventory the contents and found – a cache of eight diamonds valued at \$80,000, an 1875 U.S. coin worth \$69,000, Asian coins possibly valued at \$5,000, several other rare coins and an electronic organizer.

"When we opened it and saw the gems, I didn't know what to say or think," says Ruelas-Cervantes, an extra-board operator who joined the MTA in 1999. "There was no ID and no card."

After completing an inventory that probably topped \$155,000, according to certificates and other documents found with the valuables, the two put everything back in the pouch and locked it up for safekeeping. On Monday morning, Floyd notified the LAPD's Transit Group.

Transit Group officers Doug McCombs and Greg Ortiz, along with Detective Emma Ramirez from the LAPD's burglary and auto theft division, responded. They inventoried the bag and documented its contents.

Police located the owner

With a little detective work, the officers were able to locate the pouch's owner and return it with the diamonds and the coins by mid-day. The man, who had just broken up with his wife, police said, was despondent over the double loss.

"He was very thankful everyone made an effort to get the property back to him," says Lt. Greg Yacoubian. "He's also back together with his wife."

For his role in returning the valuables, Ruelas-Cervantes will receive a Certificate of Commendation, according to Division 15 Transportation Manager Karl Downs.

"He's an outstanding, honest person who was doing his job as he was trained to do it," Downs says. "He wasn't interested in what was in the pouch – he didn't even look."

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Operator Federico Ruelas-Cervantes didn't know a pouch left on his bus contained diamonds and rare coins until he turned it in at Division 15.