

- **GM Rich Rogers Started Transit Career as a Teenaged Bus Washer**

By BILL HEARD, Editor



General Manager
Rich Rogers

(June 20, 2002) The summer Rich Rogers was 15 years old, he got a job washing and servicing buses at a company in Orange County. The year was 1975 and – although he didn't realize it –that job was the start of a career in public transit.

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'Operators'
Mirror
Suggestion
Reflects
Concern for
Safety'

Today, 27 years later, Rogers is putting together a staff and making preparations to become general manager of the Gateway Cities service sector. Planned for activation October 1, the sector will include Central City Division 1, Crossroads Depot Division 2 and a new division to be built in future years.

Rogers' summer job washing buses led to an apprenticeship as a bus mechanic when he graduated from El Modena High School in Orange. By the time he turned 20, he was supervising the work of 10 to 15 mechanics and was in line for a position as maintenance manager.

Before he left the company six years later, Rogers had gained experience as a licensed bus operator and had progressed to the position of operations manager overseeing daily operation of 50 fixed-route and paratransit buses under contract to the Orange County Transit District.

"Although I only drove a bus when an operator was out sick, it was very challenging," Rogers recalls. "I enjoyed it because it helped me relate to the operators' problems. You could really value the work they did day in and day out, because it's not easy."

Participatory management style

From his experience working with mechanics, Rogers developed a strong belief in a participatory style of management and teamwork, in being visible

and communicating with employees at all levels.

"There's a misconception that transportation and maintenance are in two different worlds, but in reality they're both serving our customers," he says. "I want to break down those barriers and have everyone work together to accomplish our goals."



^ In addition to his prospective job heading the Gateway Cities sector, Rogers will have agency-wide responsibility for contract bus lines.

In subsequent years, Rogers continued to build his understanding of transportation and maintenance, serving as maintenance manager of a 125-bus fleet, as operations manager of a 100-bus fleet and in similar management positions for a succession of Orange County transit companies.

During 10 years with Dave Transportation Services in Anaheim, Rogers rose from project manager of an 80-unit paratransit contract in Pomona Valley to regional general manager responsible for more than 40 transportation contracts throughout the western United States. Most recently, he was vice president of Transportation Concepts, headquartered in Irvine.

At the MTA, in addition to his prospective job heading the Gateway Cities sector, Rogers will have agency-wide responsibility for contract bus lines. Could his background in contract transportation cause concern among sector employees?

His role at the MTA

"There should be no concern," he says. "When I was on the private side, my business was to provide the highest level of quality transportation service in the most cost-efficient way. That also applies to my role here at the MTA."

Rogers strongly believes that the sector concept can forestall any local movement toward transit zones. "The service sectors are designed to provide service that's more community-based, to be more responsive to our customers' needs and to be more cost-efficient. I feel that by working as a team, we can achieve that goal."

As he continues preparations for the October opening of the Gateway Cities sector, Rogers has a number of things on his mind: completing his staff, finding office space outside MTA Headquarters and looking for ways to improve working conditions at divisions 1 and 2, among them.

Assessing his sector's needs, Rogers notes that both divisions have reached capacity for maintenance and storage of buses. Both also need additional employee parking and, although

ideas for off-site parking have been advanced, they're "not what you'd call an optimum situation for either division."

On a positive note, Division 1 will be getting a new bus wash and a new vacuum system. And, Rogers will be looking at locations for construction of a third division for the Gateway Cities sector.

Getting acquainted with staff

Meanwhile, Rogers is getting acquainted with his new sector staff, with the division transportation and maintenance managers, and with the division employees who will work with him. They're also getting to know him.

Safety is one of the things he's concerned about. "I've found throughout my career that you have to constantly talk about safety, otherwise it only comes up when an event triggers it. We want to create a safety culture...and it starts with me. I have to demonstrate that it's important, because it is a priority."

And, he describes his management style this way: "I'm a hands-on manager, but not a micromanager. I'll give advice and suggestions to my managers, but I won't dictate to them. I see myself as someone who will be there to support and develop a quality team."

Rogers and his wife, Erin, a homemaker and part-time transit consultant, have been married 10 years. They live in Santa Ana with their three daughters, Rachel, 9, Sarah, 7, and Claire, 16 months. He also has a 12-year-old son, Shawn.

In his off hours, Rogers enjoys spending time with his family, reading, sports and physical fitness.

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