

Acts of Courage: Remembering MTA's Heroes of 2002



IN THE LINE OF DUTY - The MTA Board commended five Metro Bus operators, July 25, for three separate acts of courage in providing life-saving assistance to members of the public. From left are Operator Myra Jackson of Division 3, Operator Garry Brown of Division 10, Operator Sara Bernal and Trainee Tamara Houston of Division 3 and Don Smith of Division 10. PHOTO BY BILL HEARD

(Jan. 16, 2003) The tragic events of Sept. 11, 2001, gave Americans – and the world – an example of camaraderie and bravery in the face of extreme danger.

The unparalleled heroism of that day has since inspired others to help their fellow citizens through acts of kindness and courage in everyday life. In 2002, many MTA employees took extra measures to help their customers by offering superior service and personal assistance.

Twelve of those employees, however, are remarkable for acts that went above and beyond the call of duty. From something as simple as returning a large amount of cash to its rightful owner to helping save a person's life, their deeds were noted during 2002.

This story celebrates and remembers the MTA heroes of 2002.

- **North Los Angeles Division 3 Operator William Michael** prevented a serious accident from occurring, Jan. 8, when he steered a car from oncoming traffic. After witnessing the car collide with a bus, Michael stopped his own bus when he saw the unconscious driver's car rolling towards traffic. After steering the car to safety, Michael used his First Aid and CPR training to help the man and four injured passengers on the bus, while waiting for paramedics.
- **Chatsworth Division 8 Operator Aaron Gonzalez** found \$741 in cash on his bus on Jan. 24 and turned it in to his division office where the owner later claimed the money.
- **El Monte Division 9 Operator Larry Aguiñ** helped police break a wave of park and ride car theft cases on Feb. 1 when he reported suspicious activity from two juvenile males at the

Artesia Transit Center's park and ride lot.

- **Senior Contract Administrator Ed Kichi** was the first person able to help a colleague who had suffered a seizure and lost consciousness in a nearby cubicle on April 1. Using training he had received in the Marine Corps, Kichi quickly stabilized Ed Velasquez and administered CPR. The MTA Board later recognized Kichi with a Resolution of Appreciation for his courage and compassion in helping to save the life of his co-worker.
- **Crossroads Depot Division 2 Operator Carlos Mendizabal** followed his instinct on April 25 and helped a colleague get quick medical attention. Instead of proceeding with his usual route, Mendizabal decided to investigate when he noticed a colleague's bus stopped, but not allowing passengers on. Mendizabal found the operator unconscious on the floor and called for medical assistance.
- **North Los Angeles Division 3 Operator Myra Jackson** pulled her bus over, July 22, after witnessing a man get shot several times in a drive-by shooting. The wounded victim dragged himself aboard the bus, and Jackson drove him to her layover zone where paramedics were called to provide treatment.
- **North Los Angeles Division 3 Operator Sara Bernal and BDOF Operator trainee Tamara Houston** helped get medical attention, July 23, for a 79-year-old woman who was bleeding profusely when a varicose vein in one of her legs burst. While waiting for medics to arrive, Bernal used her own shirt to tie off the woman's leg and then elevated it to slow profuse bleeding.
- **Arthur Winston Division 5 Operator Rhonda Newsome** helped reunite a lost 3-year-old child—who had boarded her bus alone—with her mother.
- **West Valley Division 8 Operator Richard Brady** assisted at the scene of a fatal traffic accident, Dec. 1, by extinguishing a car fire and assisting the injured after witnessing two cars collide.

Two other employees were honored during 2002 for life-saving actions that occurred in 2001:

- **South Bay Division 18 Operator David Lane** received a Meritorious Award from the Long Beach Police Department, a Special Recognition Award from the Peace Officers Association of Los Angeles County, and an award from the Long Beach Fire Department. Lane was commended for saving the life of a small child on June 21, 2001, while on duty as a Long Beach Police Reserve officer. Lane performed the Heimlich maneuver on the boy who was choking on a gumball in the back seat of a car.
- **Ryan Williams**, who works as a Utility "A" in the Logistics Department, received the Life Saving Achievement Award in September from the American Red Cross, which presented it on behalf of President Bush. Williams was commended for saving the life of a one-year-old girl in April 2001, when he dislodged a barrette from the child's air passageway, allowing her to

breathe.

--Story compiled by Danielle Grossman.

[Back to MTA Report](#)