

Sheriff's Fare Inspectors Take Posts in Metro Red Line

- Two LASD fare inspectors are the first of a force of 50.

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(May 13, 2003) The first two Sheriff's Department fare inspectors took their posts on the Metro Red Line, Monday – the first of a force of 50 who will serve in the subway and on the Metro Gold Line.

Dressed in white uniform shirts and navy slacks, and equipped with radios, Security Assistants Vanessa Mack and her partner, Security Assistant Magdalena Soto, were stationed on the mezzanine level of Union Station, Tuesday morning, as crowds of passengers hurried by.

In addition to checking fares, Sheriff's Security Assistants Vanessa Mack, left, and Magdalena Soto will keep an eye out for safety and assist patrons with directions in the Metro Red Line.



Below, Soto, left, and Mack talk over their new jobs with Lt. Mike Parker.



PHOTOS: BILL HEARD

Mack stood at the foot of the escalator below the East Portal while Soto positioned herself about 25 feet further on.

"Please have your tickets and passes ready," Mack cautioned, as the subway patrons stepped off the escalator. "Thank you, thank you," Soto repeated as they passed her post, fares in hand.

Most passengers were prepared, but some had to pause and dig out a pass from deep in a handbag or backpack before being allowed to proceed to the train platform. Others headed to the ticket vending machines.

'Here to inspect fares'

"These people are on their way to work," said Mack. "We don't want to hold them up, but we are here to inspect fares."

A military veteran who holds the rank of sergeant in the Army Reserve, Mack worked for more than two years as a security assistant in the Pasadena courts. There, her job involved screening personal belongings and checking for weapons and other prohibited items.

"This is more diverse," she says of her new job. "Different things,

different people and different things going on.”

Soto, who recently earned an associate’s degree in administration of justice, previously worked as a security assistant in the county court system. As a teenager, she was a Police Explorer in the City of Maywood.

Comparing her new job with her work in the courts, she says, “It’s totally different. On a scale of one to ten, I told my lieutenant, it’s a ten!”

Must call for assistance

In addition to inspecting fares, Sheriff’s security assistants are expected to maintain order in the stations – although they are directed to call for assistance in the event of trouble. They also keep an eye out for passenger safety and will provide directions and assistance to Metro Rail patrons.

Thirty more fare inspectors are expected to join Mack and Soto by early June. The final 18 security assistants will be assigned when the Metro Gold Line is opened in mid-summer.

The security assistants come from many walks of life, says Sheriff’s Lt. Mike Parker. One was an airport employee, another was a college district clerk. Many are bilingual with some speaking Russian, Armenian or Spanish.

Each security assistant will attend a three-week training course. The curriculum includes heavy- and light-rail orientation and safety training, orientation to Sheriff’s Department procedures, tactical communications, fare media recognition and identification of “suspicious devices.”

Security assistants must be prepared on many levels to assist patrons and maintain order, but their primary goal is to enforce the use of fares. Parker believes their constant presence and visibility in the Metro Rail system will accomplish that.

“One of our goals is for people to buy a ticket,” he says. “We take no pleasure in issuing citations to people.”

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