

Division 4's Thu Nguyen Expresses Creativity Through His Work

By ADRIENNE FIGUEROA

(Aug. 19, 2003) In a small room at Non-revenue Division 4, Thu Nguyen stands over a counter, delicately polishing and assembling intricate parts of antique fare boxes.

Known as a jack-of-all-trades by his co-workers, Mechanic "A" Nguyen uses a little bit of elbow grease and a lot of imagination to complete a variety of projects at Division 4.

"He's our chief fabricator," says Mechanic "A" Leader John Kielb. "He can fabricate just about anything."



Mechanic "A" Thu Nguyen displays antique fare boxes he has restored.

In addition to making his own tools – a standard practice among fabricators – Nguyen has designed special brackets for racks, shelving units and a handicap ramp for MTA's "Metro Experience" mobile theater. Nguyen also created a collapsible ladder for a Bus Rodeo trailer.

"Its functionality was quite impressive," says Quality Assurance Equipment Maintenance Supervisor Harold Torres. "The man's got skills."

An ongoing assignment in which Nguyen, a 22-year MTA veteran, takes great pride is the restoration of antique fare boxes.

'Flashing a memory'

"I like it because I see the face of the person who gets the fare box and they think it's wonderful to have something recreated and made brand new," says Nguyen. "When you look at the fare box, you remember your time at the company, flashing a memory in your mind."

When Nguyen is not designing and fabricating at work, he spends his free time designing and fabricating at home – that is, when he's not swing dancing, singing or playing ping-pong.

"I'm actually a very handy person," he says. "I never call anyone to do any handy work. I do it myself."

Nguyen discovered his hidden creativity while studying engineering at the University of Texas in the 1970s. Enrolling at the college marked a significant career change for the talented student – Nguyen left his home and his special agent police officer position in Vietnam to escape communism and start a new life in the U.S.

Nguyen worked as a mechanic at several car dealerships in southern

California before coming to MTA. Eligible for retirement next year, he says leaving the agency is not an option for some time yet.

"But when I do retire," Nguyen says, smiling, "I would like a fare box."

[Back to Bulletin Board](#)