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MTA's Tuition Program Gives Employees a Leg Up on Opportunity

By KIM SIM

(March 5, 2004) It took nine years for Director of Facilities Maintenance Brady Branstetter to get his Bachelor's degree, but he might never have gotten it if not for MTA's Tuition Assistance Program.

Thanks to the program, Branstetter – who started as a service attendant – and a host of other MTA employees have had the opportunity to advance themselves by earning college degrees and professional certifications, even while working.

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The Tuition Assistance Program, administered by the [Organizational Development and Training unit \(OD&T\)](#), approves all employee reimbursements for the costs of educational and training programs that lead to a college degree or a professional certification.

For coursework to qualify, it must be related to MTA business and should "be related to the duties of the employee's current position or duties of a related position or promotional opportunity within the MTA," according to MTA policy. Employees can check with OD&T for other program criteria.

The amount of reimbursement for the cost of courses depends on an employee's job classification.

Tuition reimbursements

For FY 2004, which ends June 30, represented employees are reimbursed \$175 for each undergraduate course and \$325 for each graduate course, with a four-course maximum.

Teamsters and non-represented employees are reimbursed up to \$250 per unit for undergraduate coursework and up to \$375 per unit for graduate and postgraduate coursework. There is no cap on the number of courses that they may take.

For employees in AFSCME, tuition assistance is set at a flat \$1,755 per fiscal year.

Marion Colston-Fayyaz, OD&T director, believes the program mutually benefits both MTA and agency employees.

It helps participating employees "remain current with business and technology and industry best practices," she says. "Tuition assistance offers our employees the opportunity to develop professionally on their own time. It is truly an employee benefit."

400-plus enrolled

More than 400 MTA employees are currently enrolled in the Tuition Assistance Program. Interested employees can complete an approval and reimbursement request form and submit it to OD&T.

The cost of tuition registration, mandatory health fees, textbooks, lab materials and mandatory study materials are eligible for reimbursement. However, the program does not cover expenses such as travel, parking and campus social activities.

For Branstetter, there were no additional costs.

"The reality is that the entire education was paid off, no student loans necessary," he says. "It was all paid for."

MTA's core values declare that, "employees are our most valuable resource and are to be...provided opportunities for professional development."

Puts values to work

The Tuition Assistance Program illustrates this core value by putting it to work.

Cindy Karpman, South Bay Division 18 transportation manager, obtained her bachelor's degree in Business Management from the University of Phoenix through the Tuition Assistance Program. She is currently working on her MBA, also from the University of Phoenix.

"The way the environment is now requires you to at least have an education or degree to be able to promote in the company," Karpman says. "I probably would not have been able to promote to the division manager status that I'm at now (without a degree)."

Although enrolling in the Tuition Assistance Program does not guarantee an employee promotion or job advancement, Colston-Fayyaz believes those employees who take advantage of the program, and who complete their degree or certification programs are "promotable and more marketable."

"If you look at the types of people who participate in the Tuition Assistance Program, who work and go to school in the evenings, this demonstrates initiative," she says. "In fact, they are taking the initiative to do it on their own time."