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Long Day's Journey into Night... and the Next Day and Night

By DAVID HERSHENSON

(April 6, 2004) Alex Clifford knew he would be putting in some long hours in his new position as Gateway Cities general manager. But, he had no idea he would be practically working a 36-hour shift.

The long day (and night, and day, and night) began, not long after he became general manager, with two morning Gateway Cities Town Hall meetings at senior centers in the City of Bell.

Next, it was back to the office to check e-mail, phone messages and complete other tasks, before heading back out on the road for an evening Town Hall presentation in the City of Cudahy, which ended around 9 pm. Ordinarily, that would be the end of a long and busy day, but this was no ordinary day.

Clifford and his staff went back to the sector office to get a little more work done before taking a midnight bus ride. Gateway Cities Governance Councilmember Larry Nelson met Clifford and service development staff members, Dan Nguyen and Mike Sieckert, at 11:30 p.m.

Rode the line

The group drove downtown to board Metro Bus Line 18, which operates owl service between midnight and 5 a.m. and is being considered for service changes. Clifford, Nelson, Nguyen and Sieckert rode the line for a few hours to evaluate the ridership levels on the line, before heading home early in the morning to get a few hours' sleep.

After grabbing some shut-eye, Clifford headed to the MTA Board meeting at 9:30 a.m., then back to his office for a quick staff meeting. Next, he joined community relations and scheduling staff to meet with a local high school principal and evaluate a Metro Bus stop near the school.

Then it was back to the office for about an hour before heading back on the road to the final Town Hall meeting at 6 p.m. in the City of South Gate. He arrived home about 36 hours from the beginning of the journey.

"Although it was a long day, I feel great about what our team was able to accomplish. It was a true team effort," said Clifford. "During this 36-hour journey, our governance council was very supportive – Councilman Nelson joined me on the midnight bus trip, Councilwoman Eros Delgado attended both senior meetings in Bell and helped out with translation for some of the attendees, and Councilman Wally Shidler attended every one of our meetings and did a fantastic job of answering questions and encouraging people to utilize our transit system."



Gateway Cities
GM Alex Clifford

Pleased with staff

"I was also very pleased by the contribution our staff made to and during the journey," he said. "Dave Hershenson and Cathy Manzo, our community relations team, planned, coordinated and handled all aspects of the four community meetings. Dan Nguyen, our service development manager, also attended each of the meetings and went on the midnight bus line check with Mike Sieckert, our planning manager, who also prepared and gave a presentation on our service improvements at the South Gate meeting. Both of them rode the line until 4 a.m."

"We were also fortunate to have the participation of Jinny Park from the Gateway Cities Area Team, who attended three of our meetings and was available to answer questions about projects not relating to bus service, and Arum Prem from ASI (Access Services), who offered information about transit options for people with disabilities at our two Bell meetings," he said.

"I also want to be sure to thank the members of our Division Advisory Committee who volunteered their time - Robert Rodriguez, Dyana Elorriaga, Maria Avila and Elizabeth Arellano," Clifford added.

The Town Hall meetings were effective in communicating the sector's plans and soliciting input and comments from current and potential Metro customers. More than 350 people attended the various meetings.

Clifford discussed the sector concept and what the Gateway Cities sector is doing to improve service in the Southeast LA County region. He gave a general description of his vision for the future and his short-range and long-range goals.

One of the short-range goals he didn't discuss, but achieved after the last community meeting, was to get a good night's sleep.