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Division 1 friends prepared a special reception, including an elaborate "Welcome Back" cake for David Rojas.

## Division 1 Employees Welcome Returning Soldier, David Rojas

- Sgt. Rojas spent a year transporting supplies in Iraq

By SHANTAY IOSIA

(Oct. 8, 2004) The usual bustle of Central Cities Division 1 was temporarily subdued, Sept. 24, as many employees gathered in the break room to welcome Metro Bus Operator David Rojas, who had just returned after 12 months in Iraq.

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The crowd greeted Sgt. Rojas with song and cheers of appreciation. Transportation manager, Sonja Owens, thanked Rojas for his services and welcomed him back on behalf of the division.

Transportation Operations Supervisor Chris Doan presented Rojas with a plaque of appreciation, purchased with contributions from the division. Volunteers helped serve pizza, drinks and cake to everyone who attended.

"I was really amazed at how many people actually turned up to welcome me back," Rojas says. "This is such an amazing support and I am just so grateful."

Rojas has been with Metro for 21 years and says he received the same welcome and support 13 years ago when he returned from Desert Storm. The second reunion was a pleasant and emotional one for Rojas who says he held back tears.

## Reporting to duty

Rojas spent a total of 14 months on active duty in the U.S. Army National Guard, beginning with two months in Fort Lewis, Wash. He spent the remaining time with his unit in Iraq.

"I did what my Commander in Chief said," Rojas says. "When my orders came down I did my job to the fullest."

He left behind two sons when he reported to duty. Camp Anaconda, an airbase 68 miles north of Baghdad, became his home and the 17, 000 troops from the United States, his brothers.

Rojas's responsibilities included transporting supplies between Baghdad and Kuwait, but eventually evolved to include providing security for the Iraqi men who were hired as drivers.

"We were able to boost up the economy by getting people to work and we were also able to build trust with the Iraqi people," he says.



Sgt. David Rojas, now back from Iraq and driving a Metro Bus once again, thanks his Division 1 colleagues for their support.

Photos by Shantay Iosia.

## Constant threat of insurgents

Rojas says most of the people they came across were friendly but there was the constant threat of insurgents who waited for a vulnerable moment.

Attacks on his base were not uncommon. Artillery shields fell on the base every other night, sometimes seriously wounding soldiers.

Rojas arrived in a desolate Iraq almost a year ago and saw tremendous growth within that time. Rojas believes time will heal and stabilize a vulnerable country.

"There was a lot of destruction because of the bombings," he says. "It was hard for me to look at it, but it just took time for people to venture back into the city."

## Appreciates Americans' support

Rojas appreciates the constant support of the American people for the troops in Iraq.

"It was such a great feeling every time I got a letter from a loved one, friend, co-worker or even a total stranger from another state or country," he says. "It's just a relief and a great morale booster."

Rojas believes progress in Iraq is continuing, but it is punctuated by random hostage-taking and increased suicide bombings.

"I love my country. I always have loved my country," Rojas says. "But, now I appreciate it a lot more. But, whatever our next President decides, I just hope it brings peace throughout the Middle East."

