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Proud Garfield High TCAP students pose for a photo aboard the restored streetcar with Metro's Steve Brye, upper left, and Don Ott, lower left, along with members of the Los Angeles Fire Department, front row, who volunteered to move the vehicle to Travel Town in Griffith Park.



Photos by Chris Lovdahl

TCAP Students Complete Restoration of Vintage Streetcar

By PERRY WILLIAMS

(June 14, 2005) High energy and excitement filled Garfield High School, June 9, as onlookers admired the restoration of a vintage streetcar used in Los Angeles more than 100 years ago.

A half-decade of work came to an end as students, teachers, media and community members came to view the streetcar before it was transported by the Los Angeles Fire Department to Travel Town Museum in Griffith Park.

"All the credit for restoring the old streetcar goes to the students," said Robert Hernandez, Woodwork and Carpentry teacher at Garfield High School.

His students participate in the Transportation Careers Academy Program, coordinated by Metro's Organizational Development &



LAFD firefighters tie down the restored streetcar in preparation for the move to Travel Town in Griffith Park. Below, the restored streetcar is en route to Griffith Park aboard an LAFD flat-bed trailer.

Training Department. Students in various grades came together and refurbished the streetcar, which was first used in Los Angeles more than 100 years ago.

Ran until 1945

The streetcar dates back to the 1890's and ran until 1945. The vehicle was used to service the overflow of spectators of events at what was known as the Gilmore Baseball Field.



The car had become dilapidated due to being displayed outdoors at the Travel Town Museum.

"Looking at pictures of the car before getting it we knew it was completely messed up, but when we actually got it – whoa!" said student Alejandro Valdez. The streetcar was moldy, in rotten condition, beams were unstable and the car lacked essential safety devices.

Students kept the original frame when restoring the vehicle. Thanks to donations and funding provided by Unite LA, all necessary parts were received and applied. Using materials such as birch, ash, plywood and oak, the students worked meticulously to ensure complete restoration of the car.

Under the guidance and supervision of Hernandez, they removed the rotten woodwork and restored the floor frame, seats, side posts and roof. Proper shades of brown and green paint were also used to restore the streetcar's original appearance.

The 1890s streetcar in pristine condition after restoration by the TCAP students at Garfield High School.



Unforeseen challenges

"We've had this trolley for around five to six years now because of many unforeseen circumstances" said Instructor Robert Hernandez.

All agreed the most difficult part of the streetcar was recreating the roof. With only half of an old streetcar rib, Metro's Sharad Mulchand of Countywide Planning and Development volunteered to assist the students by making the ribs for the roof. This required research to find the right kind of wood, creating special jigs to hold the wood in place.

"When I saw what the students were doing," said Mulchand, "I knew I had to volunteer and get involved, regardless of how long it was going to take."

Restoring the streetcar was no easy task. Students faced such obstacles as the weather, graduation, minor accidents and unexpected vandalism.

"We returned one morning and there was writing all over the streetcar and it was like starting all over from day one," said Hernandez.

Students were determined to complete the restoration project and felt that the situations were minor in comparison to the final goal. Willing to stay after school, work on weekends and even during school breaks, the students refused to relax until the project was finished.

They understood that turning negatives into positives was the best thing to keep up morale.

Important lessons

The project gave students a good opportunity to build relations with one another as well as with their teacher. Aside from the hands-on experience the students gained, some of the most important lessons emerged due to constant interaction with one another.

"We didn't really know each other, but after working on this we've become good friends," said former student Mario Samano.

Tenth-grader Crystal Leon expressed with pride her role in restoring the streetcar. "I was the only girl, but helping with the car felt good. My balance wasn't the greatest, but I showed that a girl can use her hands to get a job done."

All the hard work came to an end when the finished product was prepared, June 9, to return to Travel Town.

'Ecstatic' for the students

"I'm ecstatic to see the students so happy for the opportunity, excited for Travel Town, and even glad that I was able to be a volunteer for some years on this streetcar," said Project Manager Steve Brye of Metro's Central Area Team.

The car was loaded onto a trailer truck and delivered to Travel Town Museum by the Los Angeles Fire Department. Eight fire fighters, under the supervision of Captain Rich Cotterall, came out to assist in returning the streetcar.

"We love doing community service and this is not only fun for us but it serves a worthwhile cause," said Cotterall.

Students were proud to see the display representing a historic tribute to Los Angeles' transit history. Visiting a museum is good, but having accomplished work in the museum is even better.

