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The Labor and Employee Relations Department has scheduled a cake and punch farewell event for Arbitration Specialist Denice Findlay from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m., Friday, in the Windsor Room, 15th floor. Findlay is retiring after 32 years at Metro. Photo by Bill Heard.



Denice Findlay's Long, Successful Journey – A Metro Career

- From information agent to arbitration specialist in 32 short years

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Sept. 29, 2005) When Denice Findlay joined Metro as a customer information agent in October 1973, she was a mere slip of a girl, 19 years old, and just starting what would become a long career in transportation.

Now, 32 years later with retirement at hand, the Labor Relations arbitration specialist can look back on a series of jobs of increasing responsibility – both union and non-union – that have included stints in operations, rail construction and human resources.

Findlay also counts personal achievements that include bachelor's and master's degrees in business management.

And she's not done yet. Although Findlay is leaving Metro, she takes her experience in labor arbitration to the Orange County Employees Association, where she will be the manager of employee labor relations.

"Every position I've had was a building block that prepared me for the next thing I did," she says. "I've always felt really fortunate that I was

able to do that.”

Hours with colored pencils

When Findlay joined the SCRTD those many years ago, customer information agents trained for 10 weeks, learning every bus route and familiarizing themselves with timetables. There were no computers, but she was given a brand new Thomas Guide and spent hours with colored pencils marking out bus routes on the pages.

When a customer asked for directions, she flipped to the appropriate pages and traced the route through the Guide, supplementing the directions with timetable information.

After 18 months on the phones, Findlay took a job as a ticket agent selling bus tickets at a park and ride lot located at a drive-in theater in Canoga Park. A decision to move to monthly passes soon ended that job, however, and she was back in customer information.

When a job as an equipment records specialist working the graveyard shift at Division 2 opened up in 1975, she put in a bid through her union, the Brotherhood of Railway and Steamship Clerks (BRAC) – later the Transportation Communications Union (TCU).

At first, Findlay didn’t get the job. Instead, the supervisor told her, “A young thing like you working graveyard would be unsafe, so I thought I would give it to a young man.”

Insisted on the job

She was promised the next opening on the day shift, but realizing that she would lose seniority bidding rights, Findlay insisted on taking the job – and the supervisor reluctantly agreed.

It was while working as an assignment coordinator and Vehicle Maintenance System instructor that she met and married her husband of 20 years, Jim Findlay, since retired from his job as an SCRTD maintenance manager. The Findlays live in Irvine, and Jim works part-time for the Orange County Toll Roads.

Following positions as an office supervisor for SCRTD’s rail construction group and as staff assistant in Human Resources, Findlay transferred to the Labor and Employee Relations Department.

In her current position as an arbitration specialist, her responsibilities include preparing arbitration cases and participating on arbitration panels with County Counsel. She also mentors five new labor relations representatives.

‘Keep your integrity’

Looking back at her career, Findlay advises new employees to “build relationships, make good on your promises, keep your integrity, identify your internal ‘clients’ and recognize that your role within the organization is to serve.”

And she always tried to have fun – no matter the job, no matter the responsibility.

“I’ve loved everything I’ve done at Metro,” Findlay says. “And, if this new position in Orange County hadn’t been offered to me, I wouldn’t be retiring, because I love what I do!”

