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[Safety](#)[Pressroom \(web\)](#)[Ask the CEO](#)[CEO Forum](#)[Employee Recognition](#)[Employee Activities](#)[Metro Projects](#)[Facts at a Glance \(web\)](#)[Archives](#)[Events Calendar](#)[Research Center/Library](#)[Metro Classifieds](#)[Bazaar](#)

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Mark Your Calendar

Rail Operations Celebration> All employees, families and guests are invited to the Metro Rail Operations Celebration from 11 a.m. until 2 p.m. on Saturday, June 24, at Division 20, 320 South Santa Fe Ave., Los Angeles.

Bus Rodeo> The 2006 Metro Bus Rodeo, hosted by the San Gabriel Valley Service Sector, will be held on Saturday, Sept. 23, at Santa Anita. Preliminary qualifying events are scheduled Sept. 13 – 16. The APTA International Bus Rodeo will be held in Nashville in early 2007.

Operator Vicky Maes-Melendez, Maintainer Ronnie Burt Take Top Honors at 2006 Metro Rail Rodeo

- Metro Red Line Operator Vicky Maes-Melendez is first female operator to win the rail event



- Winning team will represent Metro at New York finals
- [List of participants](#)

By JIMMY STROUP

(April 28, 2006) Metro Red Line Operator Vicky Maes-Melendez took top honors, April 22, in the 2006 Metro Rail Rodeo – the first woman to win the annual competition. Blue Line Maintenance Specialist Ronnie Burt won the maintenance event.

Maes-Melendez and veteran competitor Tu Phan – along with

On the scene | Photos by Bill Heard



Rail Maintenance Specialist Ronnie Burt uses a

the maintainer team of Burt, Eric Czintos and Rafaele Mastrangelo – will travel to Coney Island, N.Y., to compete in the American Public Transportation Association's annual International Rail Rodeo, hosted June 10 by New York City Transit.

Burt, Czintos and Mastrangelo were Metro's rail maintenance team at the 2005 APTA Rail Rodeo. Tu Phan and his teammate, Robert Rodriguez, won the operators' event in the 2002 International finals. Rodriguez placed third in last Saturday's local contest.

Maes-Melendez, 41, joined Metro as a bus operator in October 1986, working first out of San Gabriel Valley Division 9. She later entered rail training and was designated a Metro Rail operator in July 2002. In the 2005 Metro Rail Rodeo, Maes-Melendez placed fifth.

Twelve operators representing every Metro Rail line competed in a total of five events: Uniform Inspection, Safety Quiz, Customer Service/Americans with Disabilities Act, Pre-departure Inspection and the Over-the-Rails Course.

"Everything's challenging, when you're in the competition," said Tu Phan. "The easiest parts are probably the test and the uniform inspection, since those aren't things that change very often. But on the rules and the precision, everyone is judged the same."

One of the challenges was to identify an object on the test course that was meant to resemble a possible pipe bomb – something rail operators are trained to detect and handle, should they ever encounter such a situation.

"I knew they would try some kind of trick," said Tu Phan.

micrometer to make delicate measurements during last Saturday's competition. Burt took first place in the maintenance events.



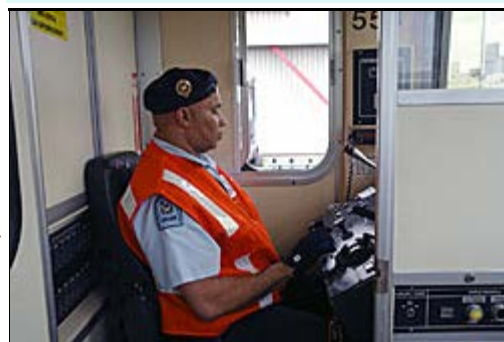
Metro Blue Line Maintenance Specialist Stan Nacon probes for defective components.



Metro Blue Line Maintenance Specialist Eric Czintos carefully measures the depth and width of the flange on a rail car wheel.



Metro Red Line Operator Rosalva Flores points out a defect as she prepares to board the test rail car. A first-time competitor, Flores placed sixth.



Metro Red Line Operator Melvin Henderson takes the controls as he prepares to start the Over-the-Rails Course. Henderson placed ninth for his first time in the Rail Rodeo.

"That's what separates the men from the boys out on the tracks."

The Over-the-Rails Course is the most important event for the operators. Davide Puglisi, transportation manager for Rail Operations Control, said the event has many elements meant to test the skills operators would need to excel in their job performance.

'Judged on procedure'

"They're judged on their procedure – making sure they sound their horn twice before they move, things like that," he said. "There are a number of obstacles throughout the course: signals that aren't quite right... and there are a variety of things they should observe and react to."

Blue Line Operator Alfredo Ramirez said even being invited to compete is an honor, since the competition is restricted to only a few out of more than 180 operators Metro-wide.

"By being here, we're winners already. There are only a handful of operators that make it into the competition," he said. "You've got to have the knowledge of the rules and the operation to compete, and to know everything is a challenge."

Maintainers from all divisions were represented within the ranks of the nine maintenance specialists who competed in the Rail Rodeo.

The eight events for maintainers consisted of the Written Test, Mystery Box, Defective Component, Dome of Ohms, Heating/Ventilation/Air Conditioning (HVAC), Wheel Defect, Measuring Devices and Parts Identification.

Four-year winner

First-place winner Ronnie Burt continued his record of placing high enough to attend the international APTA competition for the fourth year running.

"Today, the HVAC was the hardest for me," he said. "Every year it's different. Every time I seem to stumble on something that I thought would be easy. I guess at the end of the day, everybody makes mistakes and you're more prepared for one thing or another."

Eric Czintos, also repeating a placement high enough to attend the APTA international competition in June, said his rough event this year was the Wheel Defect event in which a set of wheels is unserviceable and the maintainers have to identify why.



A "lost child" sits forlornly waiting to be discovered by competitors on the Rail Rodeo test train.



Metro Red Line Operator Jorge Zavaleta, a first-time competitor, checks the undercarriage of the test train as judge Chris Medina looks on. Zavaleta placed eighth in the competition.

“In the shop, not all of us end up working with the wheels all the time, which makes it harder,” he said.

“I’m very pleased about this year’s Rodeo and the fact that on the rail operations and the maintenance sides, all four lines are represented in the competition,” said Dave Kubicek, director of Rail Fleet Services. “This is the first time we’ve had that happen, and we’re real happy to see everybody interested and out for the event.”

2006 Rail Rodeo Participants	
Maintainer Participants	Operator Participants
Ronnie Burt, Metro Blue Line Div. 11	Vicky Maes-Melendez, Metro Red Line Div. 20
Eric Czintos, Metro Blue Line Div. 11	
Rafaele Mastrangelo, Metro Red Line Div. 20	Tu Phan, Metro Red Line Div. 20
Glen Abraham, Metro Red Line Division 20	Robert Rodriguez , Metro Red Line Div. 20
Robert Dimerin, Metro Green Line Div. 21	Ruben Ramirez, Metro Green Line Div. 21
Jose Padilla, Metro Gold Line Div. 22	Ramon Alvarez, Metro Red Line Div. 20
Stan Nacon, Metro Blue Line Div. 11	Rosalva Flores, Metro Red Line Div. 20
David Bonzell, Metro Green Line Div. 21	Nasir Mia, Metro Red Line Div. 20
Suren Yeremyan, Metro Gold Line Div. 22	Jorge Zavaleta, Metro Red Line Div. 20
	Melvin Henderson, Metro Red Line Div. 20
	Glenda Murrell, Metro Green Line Div. 21
	Alfredo Ramirez, Metro Blue Line Div. 11
	Jose Rodriguez, Metro Gold Line Div. 22