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Dyana Elorriaga is a rail maintenance specialist at Metro Gold Line Division 21.



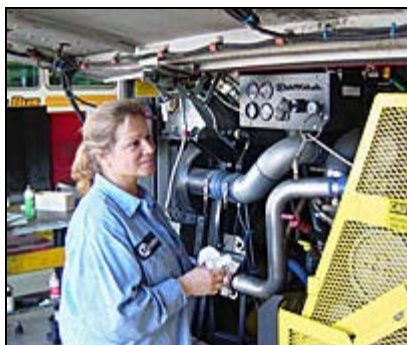
Photos by Reina Slutske

Success Story: Metro Women in the 'Man's World' of Mechanics

- Profiles of three of the 16 women who repair Metro's buses and rail cars

By REINA V. SLUTSKE

(June 6, 2006) One morning, Rosie Saavedra came to work in the maintenance shop at Arthur Winston Division 5 and learned to her surprise that she was going to go out on her first road call.



Rosie Saavedra on the job at Arthur Winston Division 5.

She was nervous, but she was given a map and was told how to find the broken-down bus. When she arrived, the operator was a little shocked to see that Saavedra was, in fact, the mechanic.

"More power to ya!" said the operator as Saavedra fixed the brakes on the bus.

Saavedra is one of 16 female bus mechanics and rail maintenance specialists employed by Metro. As these women have advanced through the ranks, each has had a different experience, but they all have shared a desire to move ahead.

Saavedra started out as a service attendant. However, after 19 years, she decided to fulfill her passion.



Saavedra replaces a filter on a bus at Arthur Winston Division 5.

‘Wanted to be a mechanic’

“I always wanted to be a mechanic,” she says. “The tow truck, working on the bus, fixing it... I was just really interested in it.”

In order to move ahead, Saavedra studied diesel technology at Citrus College while working a graveyard shift.

“Going to school was the hard part,” she says. “It took me a long time to finally make that jump. It’s a little scary, because you don’t know if you can do it.”

Along with learning all the technology, she was worried about coming into a man’s world as a mechanic. But the men were generally supportive, often helping her out of rough spots

“They know we’re women and it’s a little tougher for us, and they’re okay,” she says. “It’s not bad, and the opposite of what I expected.”



Eva Torres on the job at Central City Division 1.

Looking for advancement

Eva Torres at Central City Division 1 stepped up and got involved after becoming a mechanic.

Starting as a rail service attendant in 1996, she completed a special training program offered through Metro, an 18-month course that helps transition service attendants into becoming bus mechanics (see sidebar).

"It's a trade you learn and you keep with you all the time," she says. "When you quit, you take this trade with you, and it's easier to get hired somewhere else."

About three years ago, Torres ran unsuccessfully for ATU union representative. Although unsure if she will try again this year, she has other ambitions, including going through training to become a rail maintenance specialist.

She has enjoyed the benefits of being a mechanic, including joking around with her male mechanic friends.

"A lot of us have things in common," she says of her fellow mechanics. "We talk about kids, and their problems with their wives and what I would do... suggesting from a female point of view."



Danya Elorriaga on the job at Metro Gold Line Division 21.

A do-it-yourself attitude

Although most female mechanics start out as service attendants and take classes to become bus mechanics, rail maintenance specialist Dyana Elorriaga was working on cars when she started working on buses for Metro at age 24.

"My parents passed away while I was going to college," she says. "At that point, I couldn't go to school anymore; I had to get working."

She has since moved up to working on rail cars at Metro Gold Line Division 21. She's maintained a do-it-yourself attitude that she carries from the workplace into her life.

"Once you start doing this, it leads to a lot of mechanical things," Elorriaga says. This has included various personal tasks, from working on her own car to tiling her bathroom.

"You start picking up on stuff, and it's actually cheaper," she says.

Working in a ‘man’s job’

All three women have different perceptions of working what had been for a long time “a man’s job.” When Saavedra went to her doctor and told her she was a mechanic, the doctor was amazed.

“She really got a kick out of it,” she says.

Others, however, are not even taken seriously. When Elorriaga meets people, she doesn’t like to tell them what she does for a living.

“But when I do tell them, they don’t believe me,” she says. “They ask if I’m a real mechanic.”

Elorriaga has faced issues with people that she’s worked with as well. She has worked as a mechanic for Metro for 21 years, long before sexual harassment became an issue in the workplace.

“People have a lot of respect for me, but I’m still female, and they’re still male,” she says, noting that male chauvinism still exists. “I’m female, I like being female. I work hard and I get dirty, but I’m still feminine.”

Sharing in family life

Saavedra, Torres and Elorriaga all have children who share in some aspect of their life at Metro.

Torres, for instance, brought her two children to “Take Your Son/Daughter to Work Day” for years.

“Until my kids said, ‘Mom, I don’t want to go again,’” she says with a laugh. Now Torres, along with being a mechanic at work, is helping her son work on his car.

These three women enjoy their jobs and working with their hands, no matter how much they get their hands in the grease.

“Being a mechanic is not that hard,” Torres says. “It’s just a dirty job.”