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## Meet Aida Asuncion: A Family and an Active Career

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Aug. 18, 2006) Aida Asuncion was born Aida Rualo in Cagayan de Oro (Valley of Gold) on the southern Philippines island of Mindanao in 1947, the daughter of a medical doctor and a nurse who had met during World War II.

When she was barely 11 days old, the family flew back to Manila to be with her grandmother, who was ill. Aida grew up in the Manila suburb of Quezon City and graduated from the University of the East with a bachelor's in physics and math.



Aida Asuncion: Responding to a call from Metro, she kept her career on track.

She taught at the college for two years before marrying her husband, Edward, an American citizen, and immigrating to the U.S. in 1968. Edward, an aerospace engineer, retired several years ago and now dabbles in real estate and other interests.

The couple had four children – John, Mark, Grace and Danielle. Tragedy struck the family in 1992, when Grace was the victim of a homicide on the UC Berkeley campus. In 2002, the family established the Grace Asuncion Memorial Scholarship in her memory.

In addition to her family life, Asuncion – a petite woman who speaks in soft tones but has a glint of determination in her eye – continued an active career in aerospace, working in the early years for such companies as Litton and Northrop.

But, just as that industry was declining, she had an opportunity to change career directions. She enrolled in a fellowship program at USC where she earned a master's in environmental engineering. She later took another master's in computer science at West Coast University.

## A call from Metro

As she was finishing the program at USC, she received a call from Metro, which needed an engineer with her systems background to work with the SCADA automated train control system. She joined the

agency in August, 1993.

In aerospace, Asuncion says, "We never really got to see how the things we built worked except in a test environment." However, at Metro, she thought, "Wow, this is remarkable because you even get to ride what you work on. It was very rewarding."

But, switching from an industry heavily influenced by the military way of doing things was a culture change. In the early '90s, things were "more flexible at Metro," she recalls, if not a little disorganized.

"I could influence this," she remembers thinking. "I could be a conduit for change and work with people to get them to the right goals."

As she rose through the ranks of Metro Rail – from engineer associate in 1993-94 to senior engineer, then to rail activation manager for Metro Red Line Segment 3, to supervising engineer and then to director of Wayside Systems in 2003 – she always chose to hire and work with motivated people.

Reflecting her own career attitude, she says, "I looked for people who had set some goals and had a vision of where they wanted to be. These are the people who will make public transit the best it can be. I am fortunate to very good people working for me and for the agency."

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