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Rail Grads>Class of 11-06: Arthur Fontanez, Darrell Wuest, Tonisha Moore, Ernest Matthews, Armando Medina, Jeanne Henderson, Richard Lira, Hector Garcia (not pictured)Middle row: Norma Martinez, Edward de Hoyos, Andrea Watkins, Bonita Geyen. Foreground: Instructors Arnold Johnson, Cristobal Medina and Gerald Harper.



One by One: Rail GM Gerald Francis presents certificate to each graduate. Pictured here, from left, are Hector Garcia, Armando Medina and Arthur Fontanez.



Year's End Graduating Class of Rail Operators Adds 12 to Metro Rail Ranks

- Class Valedictorian: West African woman is the first woman from her native Camaroon to become a train operator

By GAYLE ANDERSON

(Nov. 28, 2006) Jeanne Henderson always wanted to be a train operator, even though the West African country of Camaroon where she was born doesn't even have a rail transportation system that could comfortably compare to Metro Rail.

After wending her way from her native Camaroon to France and then the United States, Henderson signed

on with Metro as a bus operator in 2004 but the chance of becoming a train operator meant a long wait for the coveted position.

But on Nov.20, Henderson was among 12 proud newly certified operators at a graduation ceremony at Metro Headquarters, where she was singled out for honors by her peers. Henderson was named Class Valedictorian of the grueling, seven-week intensive training course that UTU Local 1565 Chairman Tim Del Cambre likens to “studying for the Bar.”



Rail GM Gerald Francis and UTU Local 1565 Chairman Tim Del Cambre came to celebrate.

Henderson, obviously moved and surprised by the action of her peers, said: “I appreciate my teachers and my classmates. You helped me with the language and interpreted the ‘railroad language’ for me. I learned it with your help. I love you guys!”



Rail GM Gerald Francis congratulates graduates and Class Valedictorian Jeanne Henderson.

With Henderson at the helm, the November graduating class of Metro Rail train operators added 12 more to the ranks of some 200 rail operators who pilot several tons of steel and technology through the countywide maze of tracks and tunnels to transport more than 18 percent of the total Metro System ridership.

“The expertise acquired and achieved by operators ensures quality service,” Rail General Manager Gerald Francis told the group of graduates.

One by one, Francis presented each graduate with an official certificate and a new employee badge made distinctive by its rail identification.

“It takes lots of sacrifice and teamwork,” said Francis, with a nod to family members who attended the ceremony. “Everybody here bonded together to make it possible for these graduates to achieve this goal.”



Among the family members and friends invited to the luncheon was Henderson's brother, Joe, who traveled from France to videotape and photograph his sister's graduation for the family in Camaroon, where his pictures are likely to be displayed with great fanfare. "She is the first woman in Camaroon to become a train operator," he said through a translator.

Photos by Gayle Anderson

Training consists of an overview of the rail system and concentrated instruction on rules and procedures followed by hands-on yard operation, mainline operation and procedures specific to operation of each Rail Line. All 12 trained as Metro Red Line train operators at Division 20, said Linda Leone, Rail Instruction manager.

The class, officially certified Nov. 17, was directed by rail training instructors Karl Williams and Arnold Johnson, who were assisted in the task by rail instructors Cristobal Medina and Esther Pippins.

The new operators will continue in their current assignments in bus divisions until they rotate into operations. The new operators are Arthur Fontanez, Darrell Wuest, Edward de Hoyos, Richard Lira, Tonisha Moore, Ernest Matthews, Armando Medina, Hector Garcia, Norma Martinez, Andrea Watkins, Bonita Geyen and Jeanne Henderson.